

Copyright
by
Emily Donahue Brown
2016

**The Thesis Committee for Emily Donahue Brown
Certifies that this is the approved version of the following thesis:**

Independence and Integrity:
A Case Study of KUT News 2002-2012

**APPROVED BY
SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:**

Supervisor:

Dominic Lasorsa

Mary Angela Bock

**Independence and Integrity:
A Case Study of KUT News 2002 – 2012**

by

Emily Donahue Brown, B.A.

Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2016

Dedication

This work is dedicated to Atticus Dean Brown and Magnolia Grace Brown, the two people I admire most in the world and whose lightness of heart, generosity, patience and kindness inspire me every day.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to acknowledge David Brown for inspiring me to the graduate school path and supporting me through it; Stewart Vanderwilt, General Manager of KUT Radio in Austin for encouraging staff to pursue higher education and for permission to pursue this research topic; Dominic Lasorsa and Mary Angela Bock for their patience and guidance with this research; Paula Poindexter, who has been a generous mentor; Sylvia Edwards, who answered more questions than she was asked; Robert Cross, Ida Maldonado and various current and former staff and supporters of KUT Radio - including those quoted in this paper - who assisted with the collection of documents, interviews and other material; as well as Lucia Benavides for transcription help.

Abstract

Independence and Integrity: A Case Study of KUT News 2002 – 2012

Emily Donahue Brown, M.A.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2016

Supervisor: Dominic Lasorsa

This study employed in-depth interviews and autoethnography with reporters, supporters of and managers at KUT Radio, the NPR affiliate in Austin, as well as leaders in the public journalism movement and media watchers to ascertain the station's sense of news mission, audience and public journalism's potential for long-term relevance. KUT launched its newsroom with the public journalism goal to link the public with the civic process by involving them more deeply in the news gathering process. Early on, KUT staff believed strongly in the public journalism model. As the newsroom matured and pressure to produce more content with fewer resources increased, staff received less training in the model. Concurrent with the ascendance of digital technology, blogs and microblogs, the staff and news community adopted more public journalism tenets, which became less an operational guide and more like one element of the overall news mission.

Keywords: Online, KUT, gatekeeper, influence, public journalism, civic journalism engagement, community, local news, interactive, social media.

Table of Contents

List of Tables	viii
Introduction.....	1
KUT Radio.....	3
Literature and Theoretical Background	4
Research Methodology	16
Results.....	20
Considering a Public Journalism Newsroom.....	20
Austin's News Environment	23
Turning Concept Into Reality	26
From Theory into Practice	30
Setting up the KUT Newsroom: A Personal Recollection.....	33
Defining KUT News	39
Practical Implications in Newsgathering	45
The News Department Grows.....	53
Success?	55
Discussion.....	60
Conclusion	64
Appendices.....	67
References.....	73

List of Tables

Table 1 – Who Was Interviewed.....	67
---	-----------

Introduction

Imagine having the opportunity to launch a newsroom from scratch, in a city of nearly a quarter million people; at a time when traditional mass media were consolidating and contracting from coast to coast. Imagine that the community that this newsroom would serve was already fiercely loyal to the radio station from which news would emanate. Imagine that the station was the only source in a 5 county region spanning more than 100 miles in which audiences could receive news from National Public Radio¹ and had never had a news operation in its entire 42 year history. This city in which news would be made and covered and broadcast was the seat of both county and state government. Imagine what kind of newsroom you might build – without constraints such as the weight of past history or journalism practice.

Such was the situation in Austin, Texas, at the beginning of the 21st century. The management at the local non-profit public radio station, KUT 90.5 FM, wanted to launch a new newsroom and sought guidance through the process from journalism scholars, idealists and pragmatists.²

¹ Known now as NPR, in 2000, the public radio broadcaster was known as National Public Radio.

² Some advisors included Paula M. Poindexter, an associate professor of journalism at the University of Texas at Austin and the coauthor of *Research in Mass Communication: A Practical Guide*; Don Heider, a former broadcast journalist who at the time was an associate professor of journalism at the University of Texas at Austin and editor of the book *Class and News*; Maxwell McCombs, who was at the time the Jesse H. Jones Centennial Chair in Communication at the University of Texas at Austin. He is also a leader in research on the agenda-setting role of the press; W. Davis "Buzz" Merritt Jr. was then-editor of *The Wichita Eagle* and is considered one of the originators of the civic/public journalism movement; John Dinges, professor Godfrey Lowell Cabot Professor at Columbia Graduate School of Journalism and early proponent of civic journalism as a service to democracy and Rich Oppel then-editor of the *Austin American-Statesman* provided some casual guidance. As editor of the *Charlotte Observer*, Oppel oversaw some efforts in public journalism.

The project was conceptualized more than a year before launch and during a time when mass media were grappling with extraordinary change (Pew, 2010) that included a widespread decline in newspaper circulation and readership, disengagement with broadcast media (Wilkins, 2000) and well after the job of the American journalist had become defined by routine (e.g., Berkowitz & Beach, 1993), governed by hierarchical forces (Reese, 2001) and entrenched in its roles as gatekeeper (White, 1950) and watchdog (Schultz, 1998). It was conceived amid the calls for a reinvention of journalism to counter citizen disengagement with public life and news by giving citizens an active role in newsgathering (Merritt, 1997; Rosen, 1999).

It was a project built on the dual ideas that community is the basis for local journalism and local journalism can help build community (Siriani & Friedland, 2001); that “[l]ike ‘sailing gardening, politics and poetry,’ journalism is a craft of place; it works by the light of local knowledge.” (Carey, 2007). Practically speaking, KUT News in Austin was designed as a public – also known as civic – journalism newsroom. Although the movement came to be known alternately as “public” and “civic” journalism, this paper uses the term “public journalism” because that is what it was called by Jay Rosen and W. David “Buzz” Merritt, who together proposed the movement.

As the station’s first news director, it was my job to hire and train the staff, design newsroom practices, and maintain the vision of a public journalism newsroom through its first ten years.

This paper is a case-study examination of the launch of that newsroom in two stages: prior to launch and during the first 10 years of execution. The purpose of this case

study is to determine whether the goals stated before launch of establishing a newsroom from scratch using public journalism as a guide were met; what – if any – tenets of public journalism the news management and reporters built into their newsroom procedures and what – if any – remained amid the day-to-day gathering and broadcast of news.

This paper presents data from original KUT source documents and 14 KUT donors, managers, reporters and advisors. It also includes a first-person account of the launch and first 10 years of the news efforts by the news director who launched the project (myself) and evaluations of performance from selected listeners.

KUT RADIO

KUT radio is one of the oldest known broadcasters in the United States. It is a 100,000 watt non-profit radio station that became a member of the NPR station network in 1971. The University of Texas at Austin holds its broadcasting license. According to its website, KUT (under the call letters 5XY) received its first license in 1925, although it is believed to have been broadcasting as early as 1922.³⁴ The station went off the air in 1927. After a 30 year hiatus, the frequency at 90.5 FM was re-named KUT and relaunched as a

³ 5XY was part of a post-war radio boom in the 1920's. According to the Federal Communications Commission, "between 1922 and 1923 the number of licenses issued by the Department of Commerce rose from 30 to 556. The number of radios sold rose from 100,000 to over 500,000. As the number of stations grew and programming became more varied, news began to play a role, initially with broadcasters reading newspapers aloud as filler" (Waldman, 2011, p. 58).

⁴ A brief history of KUT radio is available at <http://www.kut.org/about>

formatted broadcast entity in 1958. Its then-general manager, Robert Shenkkan, is considered a pioneer of public broadcasting in the United States.⁵

In its early years, KUT broadcast a mix of music, university and public affairs. Starting in 1971, KUT added NPR⁶ programming, including *Morning Edition* and *All Things Considered*. For the next thirty years, KUT continued to broadcast a mix of format of music, talk, NPR News and other national programming.⁷ In the summer of 2001, KUT managers launched an initiative to broaden its public service by building a news department with “an ambitious plan to serve our listeners with intelligent, civic-oriented news coverage of Austin and the issues that most affect our lives in the city” (KUT, 2001).

LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

“What are journalists for?” NYU associate professor of journalism, Jay Rosen, asked that question in his 1999 review of the civic/public journalism movement. Public journalism prompted a renewed debate over the role of journalists in the latter part of the

⁵ Robert Shenkkan also launched KLRU public television in 1962. He was a staunch advocate for a free press. He is credited with helping pass the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967, signed by then-president Lyndon Johnson. From his obituary in the *Austin American-Statesman*: “Shenkkan locked horns with ... President Richard Nixon” to protect public affairs programming on PBS from Nixon’s partisan appointees on the board at the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, who wanted to cut funding for news programs.

⁶ NPR was created as National Public Radio in 1970 under the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967. Originally a group of 90 public radio stations, NPR now has more than 500 stations as members. NPR’s mission was to provide news and public affairs programming from a national perspective. Its first broadcast was live coverage of Senate debate on the Vietnam War on April 19, 1971. For more than a decade, NPR broadcast a mix of music, cultural and educational programming as well as news. In 1983, NPR became a majority news format. A full chronology of NPR can be found at <http://www.npr.org>

⁷ Other nationally syndicated public radio programming was produced by networks including Public Radio International, BBC International and American Public Media.

20th century - distilling a long-running discussion within the profession and among social scientists and media watchers. Were journalists the “fourth estate” of American democracy, serving as a critical voice of and for the people – independent from any individual or commercial influence and able to articulate developments objectively, separating facts from personal values (Schudson, 1981)? Were they the “preeminent institution” of German philosopher Jurgen Habermas’ “public sphere,” (Burger & Lawrence, 1989, p. 181) in which citizens could communicate freely about issues and developments, hold back the ambitions of the government and consider their political actions? Were they a combination of the two? Or were they creatures of routine, so bound to their sources, their colleagues’ good will and their employers’ expectations and conventions (Bennett, 2003) that they no longer effectively informed the citizens who consumed their content?

For much of twentieth century, American journalists considered their place in the news continuum as observers who presented news objectively – in a fair minded way – independently from events as they unfolded. As Michael Schudson explained in his 1981 historical review, the norm of objectivity in American journalism had coalesced by the early twentieth century. The rise of the mass media ushered in an era of research and scholarship into the workings of the media and its audiences. The processes in which journalists made the effort to engage the citizenry was of particular interest to scholars. For decades, researchers studied and labelled the way journalists did their jobs. For much of that time, journalists were “gate keepers” (White, 1950) whose attitudes toward their work and their mission were influenced by a variety of factors, including the organization and editors for whom they worked, the political and social mores of the day and the larger

organization's pursuit of profit (Shoemaker and Reese, 1995). The journalist-as-gate-keeper concept developed in the mid-century. David Manning White spent seven days in a newspaper newsroom, where he observed the process of one editor as he took in, filtered, and decided on what stories would move forward to assignment. White's findings from that seminal study launched a definition and a movement, one with which - it might be argued - journalists inside the newsroom were as comfortable as researchers outside it (Ladd, 2012).

Throughout the next decades, scholars including Breed (1955), McNelly (1959), Bass (1969) Bleske (1991) and Shoemaker (1991) refined the model. But it generally identified the personnel inside a newsroom, especially editors, as the people who defined what news was and to which stories the public would get access. News was considered pretty much a one-way street – stories emanated from the newsroom (the transmitter) to the person buying a newspaper or turning on the TV or radio (the receiver) (Reese & Ballinger, 2001). The news consumer was pretty much left out of the equation except as a passive recipient (McQuail, 1987).

The audience was a willing participant in this process, other scholars suggested. The audience actively chose which news media to consume. In 1955, Katz and Lazarsfeld studied how people take in and share the information they receive. They developed the two-step hypothesis for the flow of communication, in which media messages first reach opinion leaders who then relay those messages to others who hold them in some esteem or for whom they carry some influence. Katz wrote of it as the "*flow of personal influence*" (1957, p. 2). Opinion leaders – the influencers – had much in common with those they

influenced. Under this model, it could be argued, when audiences pursued news and information they sought out the newspapers or radio or TV programs that reflected their own political or social leanings.

By 1959, Katz was developing the gratifications approach, which described an audience focused on gathering specific information from specific media to meet distinctive needs.

Many subsequent studies employed uses and gratifications theory to explore the audience's use of traditional media to satisfy a need for information (e.g., Graber, 1984, Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000). In their study of television news, Palmgreen, Wenner and Rayburn (1980) looked into the relationship between gratifications sought and the gratifications obtained; while others identified gratifications as an important motivating factor for seeking information (Graber, 1984).

For both the news media users and news media producers, the mid-20th century was a time of interdependence. Audiences continued to demand content to consume and the journalists supplied that content. For many of those mid-century years, those journalists were some of the most respected figures in the country (Ladd, 2000). They covered the beats, issues and stories that they thought news consumers – and advertisers – wanted. Both journalists and audiences were using each other to fulfill specific needs – for audiences the need was to consume news and information that reinforced their perspectives (Katz, Gurevitch and Haas, 1973), and for journalists, the need was to stay viable in an increasingly crowded landscape (Gans, 2004; Deuze, 2008).

But by the late twentieth century, the American public had gradually become a

fractured and disillusioned consumer of information and more were expressing skepticism about the larger news media and its mission (e.g., Wilkins, 2000; Moy & Pfau, 2001). The public news consumption habits had changed as news offerings had changed. The press that once had mercilessly tracked and questioned America's involvement in Vietnam, uncovered government corruption in the Watergate scandal and the misdirection of the American public during the Iran Contra affair, appeared to have lost its way, breathlessly tracking political and celebrity scandals, and particularly on TV, generally presenting news as entertainment. Bogart and Tannenbaum suggested that that transition held not only political consequences but "the public's perception of what constitutes news, and a growing confusion between what is taken to be real and what is contrived to be entertaining" (1980, p. 211).

Recalling Lippmann's concerns earlier in the century (1922), some scholars pointed to a decline in social connectivity and civic engagement (Putnam, 1995; Friedland, 2000). Was the public disengaged because it was no longer interested in following the news or because it felt the news – and the political process it covered – was not interested in it (Yankelovich, 1991)?

Others pointed to the rise of reportage of scandal,⁸ public opinion, and adversarial or

⁸ The rise in the U.S. of such news coverage, especially on cable, can be traced to the late 1980's and early 1990's (Kimball 1994). For instance, stories such as those of Lorena and John Bobbitt, Amy Fisher and Joey Buttafuoco; the nationally televised Anita Hill hearings (Hill accused Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas of sexual harassment) which took over national broadcasts and the murders of Nicole Simpson and Ronald Brown on June 12, 1994 which mesmerized the nation. Over the next year, the news media was transfixed as OJ Simpson was charged, tried and acquitted for the murders. Some analysts called this a low point for U.S. news coverage to that point. A 1995 study by the Pew Research Center for People & the Press showed how the trial disrupted news consumption.

“horse race” political coverage such as that found in radio and TV talk shows (Moy & Scheufele, 2000; Perloff, 2013). Partisan experts and poll reporting dominated news reporting; what David Broder at *The Washington Post* decried as the work a new wave of political elites who manipulated the press and the public and corrupted the civic process (Glasser, 1999). If journalism was a critical element in the democratic process, were journalists failing the public by shrugging off the ideal of objectivity (Schudson, 2001) and swapping it for partisan, expert-dominated news reportage, thus potentially crippling the business of good government by contributing to a poorly informed electorate (e.g., McNair, 2000; Whitney, Chambers & Costain, 2001)?

Joseph Cappella and Kathleen Hill Jamieson were among those who linked the public disconnect with media distrust through research that “directly implicate[d] media framing of political news in activating, if not creating, [public] cynicism about campaigns, policy and governance and imply that cynicism about the news media may be an indirect consequence” (1994, p. 71).

In other words, the news media were putting themselves out of a job by the way they were doing their job. Fewer people were reading newspapers or watching TV news (e.g., Pew, 1994 & 1995; Gersh, 1996; Tharp, 1996). The decline began with newspapers. To paraphrase a 2006 article by *The Economist*: journalists, who at their best held governments and companies to account, were in danger. “The business of selling words to readers and selling readers to advertisers, which has sustained their role in society, [was] falling apart.”

Inside newsrooms, the decline in civic participation and news consumption sparked some introspection. “If people are not interested in public life, they have no need for

journalists or journalism," wrote a founder of the public journalism movement and editor of the *Wichita Eagle*, W. Davis Merritt, in his book calling for a new way of doing news work. Around this time, about 1990, Jay Rosen, a New York University assistant professor of journalism wondered "what becomes of the press when the public's constitution alters or weakens" (1999, p. 20). Merritt and Rosen were at the center of the public journalism movement. Also known as civic journalism⁹, proponents attempted to redefine the way journalists interacted with the public as they performed their jobs.

In a 2001 article, Michael Ryan of the University of Houston points out that Peter Parisi of the City University of New York noted a distinction between civic and public journalism. The first "seeks to increase citizen participation in public life by asking local citizens to define news agendas and to use local resources to solve problems." The second acknowledges the journalist's role in synthesizing various viewpoints that "addresses mainstream concerns about independence and autonomy, even as it gives significant relevance to community deliberation" (1997, p. 681). But "Buzz" Merritt made no distinction between the two (Black, 2013). In a 2015 interview for this paper, Merritt said, "I use the term public journalism because that's what Jay Rosen and I named it when we developed it. And it became civic journalism several years later when the Pew Charitable Trust got interested in it, and I'm glad they did, but for some reason they wanted to put another name on it. And they, in a friendly way, confiscated the idea and put their name on

⁹ For the purposes of this paper I will follow Merritt's lead.

it. But ... the historic record clearly shows where it came from and it originated as ‘public journalism’”.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Walter Lippmann wrote that “[p]ublic affairs do have an enormous and intimate effect on our lives. They make or unmake us. They are the foundation of that natural vigor through which civilizations mature” (1913, p. 13). These reformers, recalled Lippmann as they sought to reinvigorate the role of journalism in public life. By engaging more with more diverse and less elite members of the community in which they worked, and listening to what those people thought were important concerns, journalists might also re-engage citizens in the civic process (e.g., Rosen & Merritt, 1994; Rosen, 1996; Dzur, 2002). “Most fundamentally, advocates argue that public journalism is based on the underlying assumption that journalism and democracy are intrinsically linked, if not mutually dependent,” Tanni Haas wrote in a 2012 review (p. 2).

Both Rosen and Merritt loosely defined public journalism, each referring to it as a process constantly being reimagined by the journalists who were doing it (e.g., Voakes, 2004; Merritt & Rosen, 1995; Rosen, Merritt & Austin, 1997).

Nevertheless, as newsrooms did put the idea into practice,¹⁰ commonalities began to emerge. Paul Voakes cited a definition of the movement distilled by the University of

¹⁰ Some documented early public journalism experiments included Georgia’s *Columbus Ledger-Enquirer* 1988 agenda for community change; the *Wichita Eagle*’s 1990 gubernatorial coverage and the *Charlotte Observer* coverage of the 1992 elections (Rosen, 1999). A 1996 article in the *CQ Researcher* by Chris Conte gives a more complete list of efforts.

Missouri's Edmund B. Lambeth in 1998 (2004). "Public journalism is a form of journalism that seeks to

1. Listen systematically to the stories and ideas of citizens even while protecting its freedom to choose what to cover
2. Examine alternative ways to frame stories on important community issues
3. Choose frames that stand the best chance to stimulate citizen deliberation and build public understanding of issues
4. Take the initiative to report on major public problems in a way that advances public knowledge of possible solutions and the values served by alternative courses of action
5. Pay continuing and systematic attention to how well and how credibly it is communicating with the public." (2004, p. 25).

In a 2006 review of the movement, Nip provided a more succinct definition of the goals of public journalism in helping democracy:

1. to connect to the community;
2. to engage individuals as citizens, and;
3. to help public deliberation in search for solutions" (p. 214).

The idea of public journalism came in for quick and sustained criticism from inside newsrooms for being, among other things, too naïve, too quick to sacrifice objectivity and disinterest on the part of the journalist, too close to advocacy, too quick to let sources drive the news agenda, ethically questionable, a challenge to the normal workings of the newsroom, even a transparent push for publicity and revenue that undercut morale and left

newsroom employees confused as to how to do their jobs and what their roles were (e.g., Frankel, 1995; Parisi, 1997; Meyer, 1995; Davis, 2000; Haas, 2007). Venerable and established newspaper editors, those whose organizations arguably had the closest ties to the nation's elite, appeared to be among the biggest detractors (Haas, 2007). For instance, Haas and Steiner quote the executive editor of *The New York Times* Max Frankel saying, 'sounds like getting in bed with the promotion department, and that's unfortunate' (2006, p. 329).¹¹ In their 1998 survey of newspaper staff views about public journalism, Arant & Meyer noted that Washington Post executive editor, Leonard Downie held that, "'too much of what's called public journalism appears to be what our promotion department does, only with a different kind of name and a fancy, evangelistic fervor' (Case, 1994)". Some scholars argued that public journalism lacked not only a formal definition but a philosophical grounding and some suggested actions from proponents were not only inherently unfair but came dangerously close to compromising the journalist's role of observer and presenter of news (e.g., Haas & Steiner, 2006; Elliott, 1997).

Nevertheless, by 2001 a majority of medium and large market newspaper editors had accepted at least some of the movement's ideals (Nip, 2006). The idea was mainstream

¹¹ Frankel wrote a number of scathing opinions of public journalism and was quoted in various publications as a detractor. One of the most widely quoted and rebutted was his May 21, 1995 column in the *New York Times* entitled, "Fix-It Journalism" in which Frankel stated that Rosen and his colleagues should "leave reform to the reformers."

enough that the Pew Charitable Trusts established a Center for Civic Journalism.¹²¹³ This was the same time at which managers at KUT Austin began deliberating how best to establish a local newsroom.

Since the idea of public journalism was first floated and KUT News was launched, much has changed in the journalism landscape. Rounds of mass media consolidation, layoffs, shrinking news budgets and the rise of 24 hour cable news have all affected how journalists do their jobs and how the public perceive journalists (e.g., Singer, 1998, 2003; Pavlik, 2000; Cassidy, 2007; Clayfield, 2012). But it is generally accepted that nothing has had as radical an impact as the ascendancy of digital platforms and microblogs such as Twitter on the norms of journalism (e.g., Haas, 2005, Nip, 2006, Bruns, 2008). Not only has the digital age challenged journalism objectivity (Soffer, 2009), sourcing (Atton & Wickendon, 2005), professional routine (Lasorsa et al, 2011; Jordaan, 2013) and gatekeeping (Singer, 2005, Blasingame, 2011) but it has opened up new paths for dialogue between news personnel and audiences, demonstrating - even if by chance - strong elements of public journalism (Hermida, 2010). The wholesale posting of public data online has created more opportunity for investigative journalism and audience interaction (Rosenberry & St. John, 2009). Online non-profit journalism, widely regarded as a model

¹² The Pew Center for Civic Journalism was started in 1994 as a journalism incubator to encourage civic engagement among the public. The project ended in 2002. Frankel was among those noting its demise. On an archived website, the Center claims, “at least one fifth of all U.S. daily newspapers practiced some form of civic journalism between 1994 and 2001 – and their editors say it made a positive difference.” (<http://civicjournalism.org/>)

¹³ KUT-FM received a \$10,000.00 grant from the Pew Center for Civic Journalism. A report, entitled, “KUT News Planning Project Final Report 5/9/2002” said the funds were used to “research and map the community to determine how to provide coverage with a civic journalism paradigm” (p. 1).

for the future of traditional journalism, makes community engagement a hallmark (Curtis, et. al. 2010; Donahue Brown, 2010; Shaver, 2010). Social media and collaborative media, Bowman and Willis suggested in 2003, prompt participation, “discussion and community” (p. 21).

Ultimately, though, for a legacy media organization, the test of the shift in journalism and in its routines and norms may be considered in the harsh light of its success. In Darwinian terms, the survival of certain modes of old mass media forms speaks to how well the uses and gratifications of the public are satisfied, or the perception of media's contribution to a healthy democracy, exchange of ideas, and the values of the public at large. The adjustment of the local media voice to perceive needs will either be well calibrated, a happy accident, or adjudicated a failure.

To better understand the ultimate success of KUT's efforts to establish a public journalism news department, this research set out to explore three basic questions:

RQ1: To what extent were listener expectations and needs a factor in the establishment of the KUT News department?

RQ2: To what extent were those dynamics applied by journalists working in the newsroom?

RQ3: How successful was that approach?

The establishment of KUT's local newsroom was a unique experiment in public journalism. This paper will examine how – or whether – it advanced the audience's perceived needs over the course of its first ten years.

Research Methodology

This research used a qualitative and descriptive case study approach (Yin, 1989; Noor, 2008) to focus on the practices of one organization. The case study method appropriately “provides the opportunity to...capture the richness of organizational behavior, but the conclusions drawn may be specific to the particular organizations studied and may not be generalizable” (Gable, 1994). Given the time that has elapsed (fifteen years) since work began to establish KUT’s news department, using “empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence,” (Yin, 1989 p. 23) to help reveal the processes at work before and after launch can “discover new relationships of realities and build an understanding of the meanings experiences” of respondents (Riege, 2003).

Data collected for this study included review and analysis of original documents developed in advance of KUT’s newsroom launch, as well as audience statistics and internal documents produced after the newsroom was launched. In-depth interviews were also used as the primary tool for gathering new data. A proposal was submitted to the University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board. A common list of questions was provided to participants, designed to solicit experiences in context of the larger public journalism movement. The mission of the University’s Office of Research Support IRB is to protect the wellbeing of human subjects and to avoid any potential harm to those subjects. The proposal for this research, a consent form and questions were reviewed and

approved. Each participant signed a consent form acknowledging their interviews were “on the record”.

Key figures involved in the public journalism movement were interviewed as were people instrumental in the establishment of KUT News, journalists who have been or are reporters at KUT News, supporters of KUT and some listeners. 17 interviews were conducted. Additionally, a first-person account was included. (For a full list, see Appendix Table 1).

In depth interviews offer an opportunity for interaction; for the researcher to ask penetrating questions to determine an individual’s experiences, recollection and perception of events (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). They are helpful in obtaining rich and detailed information about an individual experience as well as context about external concurrent events (Marshall and Rossman 2011, Wengraf, 2001). In this, they can be considered one element of the biographical method, an area of academic research that includes oral history and autoethnography to understand historical events through personal recollection (Merrill & West, 2009). Oral history presents the researcher with an opportunity “to augment historical understanding” (Gubrium & Holstein, p. 712) with the recounting of personal recollections within the context of both everyday life and the larger context of history. It is important to note that oral history is generally recognized as impossible to distinguish from larger cultural or historic events (Passerini, 1987). In other words, when an individual recounts personal history, it is usually discussed within the larger context of events (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

This research also employed autoethnography, in which an individual recounts personal experience and uses that understanding to uncover relative cultural experience (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). As KUT's first news director, it was my job was to actualize the public journalism theory. My recollection of events is important to understanding the newsroom's performance but it is important to recognize that it is impossible to remove my subjectivity in my role both as researcher and participant. Autoethnographers understand how deeply entwined research is with personal experience. This approach recognizes "and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality and the researcher's influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they don't exist" (Ellis, Adams & Bochner 2011, p. 274).

The individuals interviewed for this study have a special knowledge due to their positions within KUT or the public journalism movement or as thought leaders in the Central Texas community (Dexter 1970; Poindexter & McCombs 2000).

Interviews were conducted between March, 2015 and April, 2016. Each lasted approximately between 30 minutes and one hour. Two interviews were conducted via email. All were "on the record." Each recorded interview was transcribed. Transcriptions were then analyzed for common themes.

To answer RQ 1 (To what extent were listener expectations and needs a factor in the establishment of the KUT News department?) primary documents, surveys and reports produced in advance of KUT's newsroom launch were reviewed. Participants were also asked a range of questions including what they knew about public journalism and how familiar they were with the launch of KUT News.

To answer RQ2 (To what extent were those dynamics applied by journalists working in the newsroom?) primary documents were reviewed. Participants were asked questions including who they thought KUT's audience was, and whether they would call KUT news a civic journalism newsroom.

To answer RQ3 (Was that approach successful?) participants were asked a series of questions about how successful the public journalism model was overall and how effective KUT has been in delivering on its mission of serving the public interest by connecting citizens with information they need to participate fully in civic life.

Results

CONSIDERING A PUBLIC JOURNALISM NEWSROOM

The question of whether public journalism was a practicable model had been tested on a project-by-project basis. But KUT was about to launch the first-ever newsroom entirely dedicated to the concept of public journalism. This would demonstrate not only how the audience and journalists could engage with each other in real terms but also whether newsroom staff can disassociate themselves from established journalism norms.

In 2000, KUT stood out from other public radio stations for a number of reasons: it was a successful station with a loyal audience base¹⁴ and well-regarded within the community. It was a mixed-format station. For most of the morning Monday through Sunday, and in the weekday afternoon drive-time, KUT broadcast news and public affairs that included a weekly call-in program and Sunday program in which readers read stories from newspapers.¹⁵ The rest of the time, KUT played a mix of folk, adult alternative, jazz and other music programming. An article in *The Austin Chronicle* from November 6, 1998 applauded the station for accurately reflecting the local audience:

On top of the strum-toot-plink of music programming, there's also a fair amount of jawing on KUT; talk shows run the gamut from old NPR reliables (*Morning Edition*, *All Things Considered*, *Car Talk*) to the locally produced (*Soundsight*, *Access*, *In Black America*). *Latino USA*, produced by KUT in partnership with the UT's Center for Mexican-

¹⁴ KUT's audience mirrored that of NPR: educated, financially secure, over 40, white. A complete profile can be found at <http://www.npr.org>

¹⁵ The program was called Soundsight and was designed to bring newspapers to local audiences who were blind or visually impaired. A good likeness to KUT's programming grid and its market share in 2000 can be found in an *Austin Chronicle* article by Jim Hardwig dated Friday, November 6, 1998.

American Studies, is distributed to more than 170 radio stations nationwide. Considering that the standard schema for public radio stations around the country is a tripartite classical/jazz/NPR split, KUT casts a wide net indeed.

KUT was also one of the few stations in the NPR system that was located in a state capital but operated without a local news operation. But the station's then-general manager, Phil Corriveau, was quoted in the same article acknowledging that the growing Austin market, with residents transplanted from other parts of the country, had begun asking for more news.

By February 2000, when Stewart Vanderwilt was hired by Dean of the University of Texas at Austin College of Communication, Ellen Wartella,¹⁶ as director and general Manager of KUT-FM, the station was noted in the NPR system - and with its own audience - for its lack of local news offerings. One of Vanderwilt's first priorities was to establish a news operation at the station:

I'm not sure I introduced something that didn't already exist in some form, there just wasn't...someone to drive it forward...At the time any substantial public radio operation in a deeply engaged community that's a state capitol, it's a base expectation [to have a news department] you know and it was more unusual that KUT didn't have a news operation than it was unusual to start one, if you know what I mean. It was a 'why isn't this here?' Kind of thing... rather than, 'wow, this is a radical idea.' The radical idea was that [KUT] didn't have one in my opinion.

¹⁶ Ellen Wartella served as Dean of University of Texas at Austin College of Communication from 1993 to 2004.

One of the academics on Vanderwilt's hiring committee turned out to be a mentor. Don Heider had been a TV journalist long before he was the associate professor in the UT School of Journalism charged with running the undergraduate broadcast journalism program. Heider was also interested in the concept of public journalism. By that point, thousands of pages had been written about the nearly decade-old and well-debated concept. Heider, who believed strongly that journalism played a crucial role in democracy, came to the idea of public journalism through his research.

I had done research about how communities of color were consistently excluded from news coverage. And so, as I thought about how that might improve, I came to start reading about some stuff about civic journalism and really became enamored of the idea...We covered news mainly in the areas where we lived and that we cared about - those of us who were in the newsroom - and we pretty much ignored the rest of the city...And then I did my research and found we do cover people of color when there's a nice festival. But other than that we don't go out and find out what their main concerns are.

For Vanderwilt, the idea of public journalism was a natural fit. Public radio ideals already stated that it had a critical role to play in a healthy democracy.¹⁷ Vanderwilt and Heider began meeting. "He and I would meet every other week and have coffee and just talk. I mean, he already had lots of ideas about news. But really that's where it started," Heider said.

"Venti caramel macchiato was his drink of choice," Vanderwilt joked.

Vanderwilt also reached out to Rich Oppel, the editor of the *Austin American-Statesman* who had also had some experience with public journalism projects when he ran

¹⁷ See Public Broadcasting Act of 1967.

the news operations at the *Charlotte Observer*.

When Heider and Vanderwilt got together, they first discussed news in general and then over time, began focusing about news in Austin. In a concept paper entitled, “Creation of a KUT Radio News Department”, the city’s media landscape was measured. “[F]or a city of well-educated adults, news coverage could be considered sparse. The daily newspaper reports a circulation of 188,000. The 10:00 pm TV news broadcasts on all stations combined, reach, on average about 150,000 homes and offer little in-depth coverage. Commercial radio news, broadcast on only a handful of stations, offers mostly headlines” (Graber, Heider & Vanderwilt, 2000, p. 2).

AUSTIN’S NEWS ENVIRONMENT

The city had an established daily newspaper, *The Austin American-Statesman*, four local TV news affiliates, KVUE (ABC), KXAN (NBC), KEYE (CBS), KTBC (Fox), a cable-news channels (News 8 Austin), and a local news-talk radio station (KLBJ-AM) as well as the alternative weekly, *The Austin Chronicle*. Austin was also home to two monthly magazines, the non-profit investigative *Texas Observer* and *Texas Monthly*, which delivered a mix of news, culture and sports and to a statewide audience. Each had its critics. One might be too liberal; another too conservative; another too shallow; another too influenced by advertisers. Another followed the old programming hierarchy, “if it bleeds, it leads.” KVUE had recently stepped away from sensational journalism.¹⁸ In the 1990’s,

¹⁸ A 1996 article in the *Los Angeles Times* provides an in-depth review of Kneeland’s crime project and its off-shoots. Kneeland’s focus was as much on what KVUE News would *not* cover as what it *would*. The

under then-vice president for news, Carol Kneeland, KVUE news instituted community standards guidelines that directed the station on how to cover crime stories, focusing on trends and community safety rather than sensational details. KVUE garnered national attention for its efforts and, although it came in for heavy criticism, it also inspired some other stations in other parts of the country to follow its lead.

Brian Benschoter was one local news executive who took note. In 1999, he launched Time Warner Cable's community news channel, News 8 Austin. Benschoter said Kneeland set a high bar for contextualizing news of the day, beat reporting and fact checking. "Nationally, news was swinging towards triviality; 'news as entertainment' and focusing on reporting without context, especially where crime was concerned," Benschoter said. "Coverage of government...particularly local government, was being minimized and marginalized. Austin was a bit of an oasis thanks to the effort of Carole Kneeland."

Except for *Texas Monthly*, Vanderwilt realized that in terms of audience and reach, KUT "stood shoulder to shoulder with all of those, but wasn't doing anything with it." Vanderwilt said,

In terms of both strategy and public service...we were...underutilizing our reach into the community for the public service outcome that we could achieve by offering a local news product...But at the same time, we weren't creating news where no service existed. We had a station that was in service, operating, doing things, putting non-music programming on the air - some of which delved into issues that could be considered news if handled in a journalistic way - and so there was the combination of 'what is the ideal' but also developing a journalistic mindset within

station's decision not to cover a 1996 triple murder drew widespread criticism, but Kneeland's guidelines remained intact.

the organization. And it...wasn't a switch to turn that on within the organization.

By late summer, 2000 Vanderwilt and Heider had started envisioning the ideal news operation. It would seek input from the community. It would eschew relying on the city's political, intellectual and economic elite to determine news coverage.

"Even in the heyday of civic journalism, you know, the *New York Times* pooh-poohed it and said 'news is what we say it is,'" Heider said. 'We know what news is better than anyone else because we are the professionals'. That is a complete crock of shit in my view. It is arrogant and elitist...I think that's true of almost all news organizations whether they do it knowingly or not."

KUT's newsroom, Heider insisted, would put the ideals of public journalism into play.

So I think you know what a news organization should do – the only way you can find out what the issues are – is go talk to people. You can't depend on the governor or the legislature to set the news agenda every day because they have a whole 'nother set of concerns that are politically motivated. Some may be valid, some may be set by their constituency but some may not. And the only way you can do a reality check on that is if you are regularly, as journalists, trying to get the pulse of the community somehow.

About that time, as luck would have it, the presidential election of 2000 stalled spectacularly. The United States experienced one of the most hotly contested presidential elections of all time: Vice President Al Gore had retreated to his Tennessee home, while Republican George W. Bush was holed up at the Texas Governor's Mansion in Austin. The entire world watched for 36 days as the U.S. Presidential election hung in limbo.

Network reporters from around the world camped out near the Capitol – trying to catch a glimpse of the Texas governor as a recount in Florida slowly deteriorated into chaos.

Local media, including the *Austin American-Statesman*, *The Austin Chronicle*, *The Texas Observer*, *Texas Monthly* and TV and radio news crews heavily covered the election that culminated in the historic and contentious Bush v. Gore decision by the U.S. Supreme Court.¹⁹

But Austin’s 42-year-old public radio station wasn’t part of any of that. The station broadcast news reports about the election from NPR in Washington. Vanderwilt saw an opportunity.

It helped give a frame to a story that was already there...It’s a base goal, an expectation that any public radio station of substance will have a news presence that will contribute to the community dialogue....What that election did and the unique connections of that election to this community was [to] give a frame to that story and say. ‘You know here’s an example of you know why we should build this.’

TURNING CONCEPT INTO REALITY

Vanderwilt began making case to supporters who could provide philanthropic backing. Like many KUT listeners and supporters, local attorney John Scanlan was somewhat dissatisfied with Austin’s local news efforts. Community needs, he said, weren’t

¹⁹ The race essentially stopped cold in Florida, where the vote count was so close that the state mandated a recount. There followed contentions of voter fraud, miscounts and other irregularities that eventually ended up in the U.S. Supreme Court. A divided Supreme Court ruled that the recount was unconstitutional under the 14th amendment. The decision led to a de facto win for George W. Bush. The case is considered one of the most problematic decisions in Supreme Court history.

being met. “I felt very, very strongly that KUT ought to have a presence as a news outlet in Austin and Central Texas,” Scanlan said.

About that time, the main newspapers in the state were beginning to withdraw their bureaus at the state capitol during the legislative session. And it struck me as being critical for KUT, especially because it was in Austin and secondly, because Austin was the state capital where both agency and legislative decisions were...made, that it was necessary for those decisions to be covered on a statewide basis.”

Scanlan made a financial gift to begin planning the KUT news project. Vanderwilt used it to gather more philanthropic support.²⁰ By early 2001, work was underway. “So, the one thing that was clear was, at least to me, was we need some kind of road map and some kind of project management to develop,” said Vanderwilt. “[M]ore than – ‘hey let’s start a news department!’ But ‘what role could it play within the community?’ I think what we did was hire Kate Dearborn.”

Dearborn had spent more than a decade as a news manager at *the Christian Science Monitor*. She started with research. “I helped brainstorm...did some of the research in terms of what the principles could be. I was kind of a hunter-gatherer around information that could be included in some of the basic [public] journalism principles,” Dearborn said.

“We came up with the idea about the survey, sort of a community meaning survey,” Heider said. “Then we applied and got the Pew grant to do the research. We did a phone survey and followed it up with focus groups that were really, really interesting about...what

²⁰ Vanderwilt credits the William and Salomé Scanlan Foundation, the Mattsson McHale Foundation and the University of Texas at Austin for providing the seed money that launched the KUT newsroom project. Later, KUT secured a grant from the Pew Center for Civic Journalism “to research and map the community to determine how to provide coverage within a civic journalism paradigm” (KUT, 2002).

they thought the big issues were and how they consumed news.”

As early as February, 2001, Dearborn and Vanderwilt met with Ellen Wartella to define KUT’s news relationship with the University. Independence from university influence was critical to the success of the project, according to Vanderwilt. In April, Buzz Merritt came to campus and spoke to KUT management about public journalism.

KUT partnered with the *Austin American-Statesman* to conduct a survey in late spring, 2001. Heider directed the survey, which asked Austin residents about their thoughts on local issues. Survey questions included queries such as “What is your greatest concern about what’s happening locally,” and “What is your greatest concern about what is happening in your neighborhood?” Respondents were asked questions about characteristics of news coverage they would want, their estimates of local media and which local issue they almost never saw covered (KUT Survey, 2001).

Heider brought in colleagues at the University of Texas at Austin to help analyze the results. Associate Professor of Journalism, Paula Poindexter was one.²¹ “My understanding was that KUT was going to start the first-ever news division, so that it would do regular reporting of local news, which was thought to be missing here in the Austin area,” Poindexter said. “And because of my survey expertise, [he] asked if I would...essentially provide...methodological expertise for the survey. And he also asked my other colleague, Maxwell McCombs, if he would do the same. So of course, I jumped at the opportunity.”

Survey results found that respondents valued accuracy, unbiased reporting, a variety

²¹ Paula Poindexter also served as a mentor to the author.

of different views and that journalists should understand and care about the community. Poindexter, Heider and McCombs derived two research papers²² from the survey (Heider, McCombs & Poindexter, 2005).

“And from the first article, it pretty much tried to provide this data in the context of public journalism,” Poindexter said.

It also factor-analyzed all the results really talking about the role and expectation – the role of journalists, the expectations that the public has of journalists, so what we did was to factor-analyze all of those questions, and from that, two dimensions stood out to me. And that really kind of developed into the second article. That the public has a, an expectation that news organizations, you know, journalists should be more like good neighbors and, you know, journalists have an expectation that journalists should be in the watchdog role. And so, right now, you’re talking about two entirely different expectations. And I thought that the good neighbor concept was just kind of a perfect metaphor for how the public wants journalism to respond in certainly a public journalism context.

The team then planed two focus groups, using survey results to help direct the content.²³ Subjects included their personal meaning of community, how reporters can do a better job keeping in touch with communities, how to report on underserved communities, the role of the media and important issues facing Austin (KUT, 2002).

Each focus group was comprised of local residents who were similar in age and

²² The first, “What the Public Expects of Local News: Views on Public and Traditional Journalism was published in the *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* in 2005. The second, “Watchdog or Good Neighbor: The Public’s Expectations of Local News was published in the *International Journal of Press/Politics* in 2006.

²³ According to KUT’s News Planning Project Final Report, dated 5/9/2002, the focus groups were originally scheduled for mid-September, 2001. But after the 9-11 attacks, the team decided that any results at a time of such “heightened sensitivities” would not hold up over the long term. The focus groups were delayed until March, 2002.

education to KUT's audience. By 2001, Austin's demography was already changing. The population was growing rapidly and the percentage of Latinos was growing as well. The first focus group was comprised solely of Latinos. This group was asked additional questions about Latino perceptions of community issues. "The Latino group was more involved in civic activity. They attend local meetings related to school, politics and the rest of the community. In the diverse group, less than half indicated they would be likely to attend this sort of meeting" (KUT, 2002. p. 5).

"You know... one of the big overall findings was that the number one issue for folks we talked to – surveyed and talked to – wasn't crime or weather. The number one issue was education," Heider said. "Why wouldn't it be? It makes perfect sense in a town where there's the university and so many people have kids or grandkids."

The focus group results were transcribed and set aside to provide primary source background research to the KUT news staff when they were eventually hired.

FROM THEORY INTO PRACTICE

At the same time as the community research was underway, KUT's management was developing public journalism "goals, mission, ethics and practices in a public radio news environment" (KUT, 2002, p.1). Dearborn reached out to experts all over the country to "get information from them in order to kind of boil it down, or have it boiled down into what ended up being the documents that supported the design of KUT." The station and the research team convened a two-day meeting in June to which they invited John

Stavitsky, from the University of Oregon who had done extensive research on public radio and public journalism, John Dinges, a professor of journalism at Columbia University who had conducted public journalism efforts at NPR; public journalism's advocate, "Buzz" Merritt; Jeffrey Dvorkin, NPR's ombudsman, Maria Martin, the executive producer of UT's public radio program, *Latino USA*; and Amy Miller, the news director of *CoastAlaska News, Inc* as well as the provost of UT Austin, Sheldon-Ekland-Olson and others.

For two days, those in attendance worked to clarify the role of KUT's news efforts in the Austin and Central Texas community. The process was deliberate and methodical and managers and staff clearly set out goals, operating principles and the values that would drive the department. John Dinges remembers it was a very intense two days that covered everything from ethics to editorial roles and planning.

I started out with a very simple idea that journalism serves democracy by providing information to voters and that's about it. And civic journalism takes you way beyond that and gives you a way to focus what you did in the newsroom in way that is eminently public service oriented. So it helps you answer questions about how we cover crime, how we cover schools, how we cover entertainment. All of the things, you're basically judging them according to the needs of your listeners. Not just whether putting something on the air is going to attract listeners- which is the commercial way of doing it...But what is the public service and how are we different from other kinds of media...where are the things we don't do that we decide not to do that other media do?

Buzz Merritt recalls how focused the conversation was.

I was really excited about the grasp that the people I was talking to, seemed to have on what we were trying to say. But even more impressed with what seemed to be some real momentum toward organizing a newsroom in a different way. And organizing it around some of the principles of public journalism. So I really enjoyed it, and they seemed

to be, sort of sponges willing to absorb and at least consider, anything I was saying about it. It was a very good session in my view.

After the event ended, John Dinges and John Stavitsky collaborated to write a founding document for the news department: *Independence and Integrity: A Statement of Goals and News Values for KUT News* was delivered June 30, 2001. In it, the authors stated that “KUT News seeks to become a model for public service journalism and to serve as a catalyst for informed community action. Our news and public affairs programming will connect a broad spectrum of Austin citizens with information they need to participate in civic and cultural life, and provide a forum for deliberation of the region’s challenges and opportunities. KUT News aspires to the highest standards of fairness, accuracy and balance in our journalistic service, valuing context and depth of reporting over immediacy of coverage” (Dinges, Stavitsky, Vanderwilt & Dearborn, 2001 p. 1).

It included details about the station’s values, editorial planning and structures and the newsroom organization and culture; strongly emphasizing community connections. Beats were delineated, although it was stated that these would change with community influence over time. Beats were developed from the survey results and refined after the focus group meetings. They were education, technology and science, local and state governance, Austin’s live music scene and other arts activities, environment, economic growth and urban development and commentaries and reviews “to reflect the diversity of life experience in Central Texas” (Dinges, Stavitsky, Vanderwilt & Dearborn, 2001 p. 3).

Equally critically, the document stated what stories and events KUT news staff would NOT cover: “daily crime, violence, family disputes and routine traffic accidents --

sometimes referred to by journalists as “police blotter” stories -- unless they are of unquestioned impact and significance to the community” (Dinges, Stavitsky, Vanderwilt & Dearborn, 2001 p. 3).

SETTING UP THE KUT NEWSROOM: A PERSONAL RECOLLECTION

I was hired as the station’s first news director. In 2001, I was working at Marketplace in Los Angeles, producing the *Morning Report*. I heard about the job through a friend who knew Kate Dearborn. I had been intrigued for years by what I heard about Austin; how cool it was, how laid back, how passionate and quirky the people were. I was aware of the idea of public journalism (I was certainly aware of the contempt with which the New York Times editors viewed it. It’s not easy to overstate the *Times*’ influence at the time on public journalists), although I was not an expert. I remember the ad stated the candidate selected would have a strong knowledge of public journalism. Nevertheless, I applied, and flew to Austin for an interview a couple of weeks after 9-11. I remember being floored by how small the town was. I stayed at a hotel across the from Capitol building. KUT’s program director, Hawk Mendenhall, picked me up at the hotel and drove me to the station past the Capitol, pointing out that it was an exact replica of the U.S. Capitol, only larger. My first taste of the truism that “everything’s bigger in Texas.”

I remember a grueling day of interviews in which staff asked me why I had changed jobs so many times (the nature of the business), what I knew about Austin and Texas politics (very little), what I thought of the local news offerings (I was underwhelmed), my thoughts about civic journalism (the public has a right to know what’s going on and

journalists have a duty to find out what the public thinks) and finally, in a dark, paneled room into which the entire staff of what looked like 40 people had mustered, I was asked the most crucial question of the day. “You are on a life boat. You only have room for two other passengers but three people are asking to get in. Do you pick Stevie Ray Vaughan, Eric Clapton or Jimi Hendrix?” Dozens of thoughts flew through my mind, thoughts like, *Was this a test of my knowledge of Texas music? Should I pick the Texan? Am I supposed to distinguish music genres?* In the end, I picked Clapton. “Why?” I was asked. “Well,” I said, “He’s the only one who’s still alive. The others don’t need the life boat.” I got the job.

My first day as KUT’s news director was December 5, 2001. At the time, I had more than a decade of experience, having worked for NBC, *The Christian Science Monitor* TV and Radio, local TV in Boston and Marketplace. But looking back, I was incredibly young, incredibly naïve and incredibly ambitious.

Almost immediately, I met with Vanderwilt and Dearborn to discuss ethics and expectations of KUT news staff, work on editorial guidelines and other founding documents. When I arrived, I was told the staff of the newsroom, besides myself, would be five. Two staff were already in place at KUT. The *Morning Edition* host was Graham Shelby, and Olive Graham, who had produced public affairs for KUT for many years. Graham became the station’s commentary editor. I posted an ad for 3 reporters.

Over the next three months, I reviewed the *Independence and Integrity* founding document, read the notes from the meetings, researched public journalism and reached out to journalists and colleagues at the *New York Times*, *Christian Science Monitor*, Marketplace, NPR and other news organizations to begin to develop KUT’s guidelines and

editorial standards. I also was responsible for designing the newsroom – from wall colors, carpet and cubicles to computer systems, reporter equipment and wire services. Having arrived from a small, nimble organization, I was stunned at the slow pace and sheer size and complicated nature of the bureaucracy that was the University of Texas at Austin. Vanderwilt had carefully prepared a facilities plan and budget to accommodate the newsroom's location in what was a very crowded building, but the university bureaucracy and some staff acclimated to the previously slow and casual pace of KUT operations didn't always cooperate.

It took months to get the newsroom painted, months to order and install furniture, months to get computer equipment and reporter kits ordered.

I relied heavily on the founding document developed at the two-day meeting in June of 2001. I referred to it almost daily, as I wrote the station's news guidelines and editorial standards that focused on fairness, accuracy and balance (a copy is listed in Appendix attachment Two).

In January, I met separately with Don Heider, Paula Poindexter and Dean Ellen Wartella to discuss civic journalism, the station's surveys, prepare for focus groups and to discuss the news relationship between KUT and the University.

In March, 2002, I monitored the KUT/*Statesman* focus groups held at the Statesman offices. I listened to the focus group participants. I remember - and Stewart Vanderwilt confirmed in an interview in 2015 - comments about the difference between East Austin and West Austin. It was my first concrete understanding of Austin's very real divide – geographic, economic and racial. Vanderwilt said,

I do remember and this was in the focus group and that's why we ignored it. Because in focus groups if one person shares their opinion strongly it's not an indicator of this is the ... I remember someone saying..."I don't care what goes in East Austin, I never go there I'm never going to go there I don't know why we need to hear about it." It's good to know there's people who feel that way but that sort of drives us the other way. Wow if there's that type of feeling we need to do the opposite.

I recall taking a bus tour of Austin with Dean Graber, a UT graduate student and producer with *Latino USA*, which was then produced by the University and KUT. He had helped write the concept paper making a case for KUT News. He sat next to me and pointed out neighborhoods and city landscape features, taking particular care to show me neighborhoods that had bad reputations, others that were noticeably run-down and how Interstate 35 cut through the middle of the city. I thought at the time that Graber was being friendly. I assume now, having interviewed Don Heider for this paper, that this was strategic, educational move. Heider told me that a good idea for new public journalists is to, "load the staff on the bus and take them to parts of the city they've never been to – expose them to things they wouldn't normally see or hear."

By May, three reporters were hired: Steven Cuevas, Amy Brand and Ben Philpott. For the next few months, I introduced them to KUT's founding documents, explained that our beat structure would be informed by the community and our founding document, sent them on similar bus trips and to explore local institutions such as the Texas State History Museum, developed the assignment and editing process and assigned beats, engaged a

trainer to establish the writing and delivery style²⁴ for the newsroom and worked with Graham and Shelby to introduce them to my expectations of a public newsroom.

It didn't always go smoothly. Shelby and Graham had been with KUT when it was a sleepy mixed-format station beloved by its followers for its quirkiness. They were, like many of the staff at the time, somewhat suspicious of this new enterprise, and wary of my zeal to quickly build something that would stand out in the public radio system, change the news landscape in Austin and take no prisoners on the journey. I was often ham-handed and impatient.

Philpott and Cuevas – both public radio reporters - had relocated from Alabama and San Francisco respectively. Brand was a TV producer who had never done radio. Shelby, who considered himself more of a storyteller than a journalist, quickly left. Julie Moody, a local radio personality and TV reporter, was then hired as *Morning Edition* host. Although KUT did air some newsroom-produced content between May and July, KUT's official launch date for KUT News was July, 2002. We produced content for two, two and a half minute newscasts during *Morning Edition*. I believe they were at 7 and 8 a.m. We also produced occasional longer stories – closer to 5 minutes – which aired at 7:30 a.m. Within six months, we had added 6 am. Within a few years we added newscasts at the half hour.

²⁴ Radio consultant David Candow had worked as a trainer for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation for many years. He stressed simple writing, conversational delivery and eschewing artifice. He stressed the connective power of one human hearing another human voice. To this day, when I train new staff or interns, I refer to “Candowisms” such as avoiding dependent clauses. “If you have a sentence with more than one idea, start a new one at the comma.” He was one of the most powerful influences in my career and I invited him back several times to train staff at KUT. Candow died in 2014.

I assigned and edited all of the news content that KUT produced locally. The team met daily each morning to pitch ideas and talk about events and issues in Austin. The reporters were encouraged to develop traditional and non-traditional contacts and share them with all staff in a publicly shared electronic file.

Some of the stories that developed within our first few months of broadcasting included the movement to “Keep Austin Weird,”²⁵ catastrophic summer floods in Central and South Texas, a home insurance crisis linked to mold claims, a police-involved shooting death of a mentally ill woman in East Austin named Sophia King,²⁶ the arrival of West Nile virus, the first Austin City Limits Music Festival, the Republican party sweep of the 2002 elections for statewide and Congressional offices, the subsequent investigation into a super PAC linked to then-House Speaker Tom DeLay and the death of journalist and Johnson presidential aide, George Christian (who also had strong ties to KUT and the University of Texas). Within seven months, the war had started in Iraq.

It was not a slow news year. KUT news staff covered all of these stories and more. We went to town meetings and police briefings, we knocked on neighborhood doors in East Austin and downtown, we broadcast the first-ever live locally produced coverage of

²⁵ Keep Austin Weird was a marketing plan developed by local businesses to protest the development at West 6th street to include a Barnes and Noble. It morphed into a movement with bumper stickers, T-shirts and other memorabilia that influenced the perception of Austin nationwide. According to one source, the slogan originated on KUT by a caller making a pledge. See “Can Austin Stay Weird” by Joe Yonan in a 2011 article for the *Washington Post*.

²⁶ Sophia King was shot and killed by APD officer Michael Coffey in August, 2002. Her death prompted a city-wide self-examination of police behavior and racial bias, mental health services and the city’s racial and economic divide.

election night, 2002. For every story in those early months, we followed KUT's founding document. We tried very hard to stick to the news beat structure. Most of us learned the city as we went.

By March, 2003, a small team of three reporters and me had produced a documentary on the impact of the Iraq war on Texas. Entitled, "The War and Texas," the program was put together in two weeks and explored the impact on military staff and bases, industries, and the safety of the state's industry and food supply. Reporters traveled to Fort Hood and spoke to children of soldiers and their teachers, we spoke to Texas authors and artists and poets and musicians and soldiers who chose not to fight about their views on the war. We went to San Antonio to a US flag manufacturer and explored the relationship between Mexico and the US following Mexico's pacifist stance on the war.

The show was produced fast and furiously, to compete with the events unfolding in Iraq. The message from Washington was that the war would be short, indeed. I specifically remember approaching KUTs' program director, Hawk Mendenhall, and asking him whether KUT would run the program if the war was already over. The first sentence of the show's introduction referred to "a war in its final stages." Little did we know then!

DEFINING KUT NEWS

During my job interview with Stewart Vanderwilt and in early meetings with him after I was hired, he stressed two things repeatedly. The first was that he wanted KUT to produce "news you could dance to." I took that to mean that he wanted us to produce radio

reports that didn't sound like your typical dryly delivered public radio news at the time. The newsroom founding document put it this way: "KUT News intends to create a newsroom culture that is creative enough to capture Texas' sound and soul, and smart enough to direct coverage to stories that keep our listeners informed, delighted and surprised" (Dinges, Stavitsky, Vanderwilt & Dearborn, 2001 p. 2).

So we experimented with projects that included news delivered without a reporter's voice, sound portraits of events and places narrated by subjects, adding music and other clips to news reports and incorporating a lot of natural sound into reported pieces.

The second message I got from Vanderwilt was that he wanted KUT to be noticed quickly within the larger public radio system for its news operation. "I want a lot of awards." In our first year, KUT news collected 7 local, state and national broadcast journalism awards. By 2012, we had accumulated approximately 200.²⁷

In 2002, we had 6 full-time staff made up of 3 reporters, a commentary editor, *Morning Edition* host and a news director. Over the next 10 years, the KUT newsroom grew. We added additional newscasts in 2004, a full-time news editor and a weekend reporter in 2005. We added a second reporter on the city beat, a part-time assistant to the Capitol reporter and a *Morning Edition* producer in 2007. In 2010 we added an online reporter, in 2011 two full-time reporters and in 2012 an *All Things Considered* host and producer. By 2012, KUT News had 12 full-time staff and several part-time staff. The

²⁷ KUT maintains a comprehensive list of awards the news department has accumulated. They are in an electronic document on the station's server.

budget or the news department in 2004 was \$341,074.00. In 2012 it was \$942,620.²⁸ In 2002, KUT News produced about 3-5 minutes of news on average daily. By 2012 we were producing close to 30 minutes of news and a full-time news feed at kutnews.org, with social media and other episodic outreach.

One of the tenets of public journalism expressed repeatedly by its proponents was the importance of staff training. As news director, I included a line item in my budget for that. I stressed to all staff the importance of training - especially in a small newsroom where there weren't many opportunities to advance - how important it was to invest in personal growth as a reporter. I tried to have at least one in-house group training each year. Reporters and producers were encouraged to seek outside fellowships and training. Of course, the newsroom relied heavily on student interns. Some of them were corralled into reporting very quickly. So, I spent significant time developing a tough training program for student journalists. Between 2002 and 2012, I hired and trained approximately 140 interns, about 2/3 of whom went on to work in news organization in Texas and elsewhere.²⁹

There were some concerted efforts made to engage the community on issues and to present programming that would encourage participation in civic life. In the first ten years of broadcast, KUT news produced several special reports including a biography of Barbara Jordan told in first-person narrative, with a public event and companion curriculum for middle school students; a series on the implication of a sale of the Christmas Mountains; a

²⁸ 2004 is the earliest newsroom budget available. But because the staffing structure was static for the first two years and the newsroom was not producing special projects at that time, it is likely very similar in amount to the original newsroom budget. Both the 2004 and 2012 budgets are located in the KUT business office.

²⁹ KUT keeps a list of interns, with their years of service and their last-known employment on its server.

preview examination of the fracking boom that later swept the state; a project on what happened to the sugar in Sugarland; a special report on the border radio phenomenon; a series and documentary on illegal immigration into Texas and issues raised, along with a special series and documentary on the end of NASA's space shuttle program. One of the most impactful was an oral history project developed following the wildfires that swept Central Texas in September of 2011. For a year, KUT sought stories and accounts from those impacted. The project included a documentary built from more than 100 hours of interviews with personal photos, videos and mementos, an interactive website detailing the development of the extreme drought conditions in the state at the time, a profile of each of the participants, a public event and securing the archives at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History. But all of the special reporting projects were driven in part by interest expressed from the audience and all of them were produced, as the tenets of public journalism would advise, in an effort to hear from people affected rather than experts. Many included a community gathering or panel discussion. By 2012, social media and digital engagement such as feedback at the website were encouraged.

Starting in about 2005, the news department sought a number of collaborations to further the reach and impact of its reporting. Partnerships with KLRU-TV, the *Austin American-Statesman* and some community groups were the most common. Starting in 2005, the station produced several special projects with *Texas Monthly*. Topics included Texas cycles of drought and flood, what it means to be from Texas, a Texas-focused review of the Bush presidency and another on how to make Texas a better place – all populated by non-expert and generally non-elite sources. There were also two reported series, public

events and special programs in collaboration with the Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Participation and KLRU-TV that were designed to highlight challenges to engagement and present possible solutions.

One of the most significant partnerships of KUT first news decade was with the *Texas Tribune*. An online non-profit, the *Tribune* launched in November, 2009. KUT and the paper shared resources, reporting and even staff: for roughly its first two years, Ben Philpott was stationed half at the *Tribune* offices and half at KUT.

KUT news launched a number of special reporting initiatives during its first ten years. One early effort at community interaction was the KUT News Map (kutnewsmap.org) in 2010. It was an online gathering space designed for citizens to map and discuss places in Austin that were personally, politically or socially significant. The news department seeded the site with videos and held two public meetings to which we invited local advocacy and neighborhood groups.

The most significant however, was StateImpact Texas. It was designed from inception to use public data to tell stories and make that data available to citizens to interact with and to solicit stories from citizens and consider the stories those most impacted by state policy involving energy and the environment.³⁰

When it came to the day-to-day production of news over the first ten years that KUT's news department was in existence, an almost daily challenge was to maintain commitment

³⁰ StateImpact Texas was one of six state projects that were part of an NPR initiative that NPR's website said were "dedicated to examining how state policy and issues affect people and communities. With reporting teams in six states, the project seeks to inform and engage communities through explanatory, data-driven, accountability journalism."

to civic journalism as an organizing concept. As new staff came on board and the content delivery expectations continued to rise, the message became more diffuse. It was often easier to produce more content for newscasts from the desk than from the neighborhoods. While reporters and producers still worked hard to avoid elite sources, it was not always possible.

One of the most important influences for the news enterprise has always been resources or the lack thereof. The resources could be broken down into basic elements:

- Financial resources: News is an expensive operation – one of the most expensive operations any broadcaster can undertake. KUT is a non-profit that for many years operated on a shoe string budget;
- Human resources: News is labor intensive. The station did not have the budget to afford the salaries that brought experienced reporters and in most cases, we trained green reporters from scratch. Additionally, the newsroom staff was small and so we had a daily challenge of deciding which stories we could cover (and how) with the reporting power we had;
- Time resources: News programming had to fit into a tightly controlled network programming clock that allowed for little deviation. Reporters had the pressure of time to meet a deadline and broadcast length;
- Intellectual resources: No matter how large the newsroom grew over time, management ambitions grew even more. When the newsroom was conceived, it was decided staff would present fewer, more in-depth stories. By 2012, the station wanted KUT to provide the “news of record” for Central Texas.

A lack of resources overall was a constant challenge not just to meeting the goals of the news department's founding document but also the expanded goals for the department as it matured.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS IN NEWSGATHERING

"Public journalism is not a trick. It's not a device. It's not a technique. It's a way of thinking about your job." Buzz Merritt has said those words countless times to countless journalists since he coined the concept of public journalism.

The ambient news atmosphere in Austin when KUT launched its news department was not dissimilar to many medium sized cities at the turn of the new century. Kevin Brass, who worked for nearly a decade as the media critic for the *Austin Chronicle*, put it this way:

Coming from outside the market, I was really shocked at the level of media in Austin. There's just not a lot. The Statesman is a legacy, monopoly newspaper that has not had competition in a long time. The Chronicle is an established alt weekly that has sort of its own deal going, mainly in arts and music. And there was a big drop off from there, right? There's just not a lot of players in the market, so I think on that basic level, I think people were really, really happy to have KUT and another player in journalism.

The wave of media consolidation and the contraction of the news industry was already underway. Austin native Elizabeth Christian is a public relations executive and long-time KUT listener and supporter.

We used to have a ton of news on the radio...KNOW, KVET, KLBJ, a lot of big radio news staff that were very important to people. They were just ebbing and on the way out when KUT made its debut. So I think, while people may have worried, because what people turned to KUT for was national public radio, they wanted to make sure the news product locally was a high quality as that. I think they were glad that somebody was coming in to fill that vacuum.

The stakes for the station were high. Its audience was passionate and set in its ways. KUT had been a mixed-format news and music station for decades. Many members were like Mary Gordon Spence, who had been listening to KUT since 1985 and supporting it as a volunteer and on-air fundraiser since the early 90's.

I was fanatically supportive from the top of my hair to the tip of my toes...the first thing I fell in love with was Morning Edition and then the music...I didn't know anybody who didn't know KUT...KUT was the center of my community...it felt like a home base to me in Austin.

Jim Cousar was also a long-time fan and supporter. He moved to Austin around 1980. He recalls an article in a magazine called *Third Coast* edited by John Tolliver. "He wrote a piece...probably about 1982...He talked about how KUT is *my* station...I remember talking to Tolliver later and saying 'I just absolutely agree, we are so lucky to have it here.'"

Many such listeners were skeptical that KUT even needed local news. Local breaks would only take away from time with the network. "I don't think I expected much," Spence said. "I remember feeling like 'why do they think they've got to do news when we've got other news?'"

"This may not be the majority of the audience but certainly the hardcore, core

audience...and that was a tough audience to win over,” Vanderwilt said.

How did it go? In 2002, KUT’s total radio audience was 145,200. In 2012, it was 232,000.³¹

Ben Philpott was one of the first reporters hired at KUT. He’s been with the station since 2002. An experienced journalist when he was hired, having put in nearly a decade reporting for TV and public radio in Alabama, Philpott understood the experiment that was underway. He says the message of public journalism was consistently reinforced inside the newsroom, so much so that reporters, “make informing the public and providing them with what they need to engage. That goal is built into their morning meetings, their long-range planning, everything they do. It’s just in their DNA.” It didn’t make covering the news easy, though. There were tough decisions about what stories *should* be covered and what *could* be covered, given the resources.

“To be absolutely honest. It was a tough startup,” said Jim Cousar.

Some of the early reporters were very enthusiastic. But I don’t think they had that much journalism and certainly not that much on-air journalism experience. And there were some stories early on that I thought KUT kind of didn’t get right...I mean it’s not that anybody in Austin was covering these stories a whole lot better...and I wouldn’t say I was critical of the early news efforts but I remember talking to Stewart and other KUT people saying, ‘I think we need to sharpen the focus and skills of the KUT journalists.’

³¹ Data from the Radio Research Consortium - they are effectively the Arbitron/Nielsen for Public Radio. One of KUT’s motivations for launching a news department was that it would build audience, and by extension, station coffers. But it is not an obvious connection that KUT’s news was solely responsible for building the station’s audience. The region’s population grew by more than 50% during that same time.

Don Heider thought the news department was well-intended, but noticeably young. The first news was “hit or miss...There were good stories and some weird, quirky stories and I think that was all part of trying to find your identity as a news organization.” Paula Poindexter was impressed that the startup got off the ground at all.

Because I was involved in the launch of KUT...it was something that I always marveled at. The fact that it was happening. I also felt that KUT was really trying to cover stories that probably you couldn't find in the *Austin American-Statesman*, and to give some sense of what was happening around the area in a new way. I felt that it was always very, very much trying to engage the public with not only the stories that it was reporting, but it was a more, I felt it was a more engaging style. So, it definitely was not the local newspaper, and it wasn't TV, and just seeing, these are smart, sophisticated stories that they're telling in a very interesting way and people want to know this. That was always my opinion.

Julie Moody was another of the first journalists hired at KUT. Early on, she found it an uphill battle to get sources to return calls.

I think the major obstacle was educating the public on the fact that KUT was a professional newsroom with professional reporters. Oftentimes, I think the community at large thought we were journalism students from the University and didn't take us very seriously. We really had to prove ourselves that we weren't students but rather professionals. And the type of stories we were producing were different from what was/or is today heard over the airwaves in Austin.

The *Austin Chronicle* delivered a lukewarm review of KUT's news launch January 3, 2003.

The new KUT news division has initially fallen short of admittedly high expectations, sounding sometimes more like student journalists than professionals prepping for that step up to the NPR national desk. But you know what? They're already the best local news on radio right now, as

the rip-and-read hourly updates on KLBJ-AM provide a pretty low standard to hurdle. Two cheers, and keep at it...

Brian Benschoter had started up an Austin news organization a couple of years before KUT's launched. Benschoter's own operation, News 8 Austin, had been conceived as a hyper-local newsroom with a focus on civic engagement. As he put it, "informing people of issues of importance to the community, how it will impact the stakeholders, how the stakeholders can become educated participants in addressing issues to the collective advancement [or] betterment of the community." So he was watching KUT closely.

I like what I heard from the get go. They avoided triviality. The commitment to craft was there. They framed issues well...not a this-or-that...but on a continuum with a lot of subtleties and texture. They provided the time for news gathering and large enough news holes on air for substantive treatments.

Joy Diaz arrived at KUT in 2005. She said what struck her when she walked into the newsroom on her first day was how hard everyone was working.

It was a very small newsroom. There were only three or four full time reporters and a lot of students that were doing internships there. And me. I think I was the only freelance reporter there...Physically it was a very dark room so all the walls were painted bright colors. And there were signs sprinkled throughout the walls, I think maybe the intent was we would internalize these signs...I remember one of them was our mission and what our mission was. I think it was 'to be the most trusted news source in Texas.' One caught my attention immediately...there was a picture of the 'changing face of Texas' it was a human face divided into fourths, clearly a fourth Hispanic, a fourth Caucasian, a fourth Asian...I think because of my status as an immigrant, that picture, seeing it there daily, reminded me...my source doesn't have to be Caucasian all the time, my source doesn't have to be English speaking...it was a constant reminder of seek out the diversity, every person has a story to tell, tell those stories.

Julie Moody had been working at KUT for three years by then. She had moved on from being *Morning Edition* host to reporting on arts and culture.

The news room really took its time in creating the right kind of stories, and working with the equipment to ensure the best quality sound. When we first began broadcasting our local content...there was maybe one or two pre-recorded stories with sound on tape. But as time progressed...more content was added as everyone in the newsroom grew accustomed to the city/the station and the needs of the newsroom in general.

Diaz said that the ethic of hard work ran deep and the expectations were high. “I remember one story I worked on [Donahue] took the paper to the newsroom and said, ‘look: 45 second spot. Three cuts, three different voices, two languages’...to me that was the cue,” she said.

Moody agreed. “I thought...the reporters had lofty goals, but those goals could only be met with hard work and perseverance and reporting skills,” she said. Moody said staff were held to the highest standards and the community gradually recognized it. She has likened the editing process on occasion to “giving birth” but considered the end result some of her best work. “I played a role shaping and forming what was reported, how it was reported, and why KUT news reported what it did,” she said. “But it was under the direction of the news director Emily Donahue, who created a new, reliable news source for the Austin community.” (As stated earlier, the author of this paper was the station’s first news director).

At the *Austin Chronicle*, media critic, Kevin Brass, kept a watchful eye.

And I just, I thought it was really kind of just basic, very inexperienced reporters just going out and trying to do some basic stories. I do remember one story that I wrote down...There had been an accident I think...right across on campus. And the story was literally how to cross the street. And not only that, but how to cross the street within ten feet of your office. So like, 'OK, wait a minute, that's unfair, that's not representative of what you do.' But...those kind of stories would pop up...I just found that most of the stories were very lightweight. One interview, happy community stories, non-confrontational [stories].

But the audience gradually seemed swayed. Elizabeth Christian said the station seemed to have found its feet by about 2004. Mary Gordon Spence said that "little by little" it became a part of her routine.

Eventually, Brass conceded, KUT's reporting got better. "I am probably more of a critical listener than most. But I didn't feel anything radically different was going on. I mean, I felt it was nuts and bolts journalism."

Inside the newsroom, Diaz said the mission was to tell stories of the community. One day, she met a woman and they got talking about her house, which was for sale. Diaz was house hunting so she went to see it.

A fixer upper is an understatement. But we became acquainted. And I told her I was a reporter. She later contacted me and said 'it turns out I cannot sell you my house. It turns out I don't own my house, somebody else owns it'...it turned out it was a fraud, a scheme and 19 families were involved...I got a call from the Attorney General on my direct line. Who is now our governor...he said, 'I was on my way to work this morning and I heard your story and we want to help these families.'...Eventually maybe 2 or 3 years later the families got possession of their homes.

John Scanlan was by then serving on the station's advisory board. He helped Vanderwilt set station policy but stayed out of the day-to-day operations. As a listener, though, he was content.

I do remember that I was pleased at the thought of what some of the issues that were raised. And with time, they...addressed more controversial issues. And I was glad to see that. I always thought that the reporting was fair. In fact, fairer than the other side was being fair, addressing the same issues. You have to understand that I'm politically very, very liberal. And so, when I talk about being fair, I thought that you all were fair to both sides at the cost of not confronting the others for being too far to the right.

Some of the people who were involved in the newsroom's launch agreed. But there were pressures behind the scenes at the station. Heider said the same audience that resisted local news in the beginning, resisted any expansion of its presence.

I think the early compromises were: 'do you even have the guts to cut an hour of music out of a 24 hour schedule so that people might actually learn something about the world?' ...I know there was incredible tension every time he tried to add more news and information.

Cousar said, "KUT had a deep level of loyalty. But people were also proprietary about what they liked best about the station." And they were vocal with the management about any changes to station programming. The station did expand its news presence, gradually but consistently. The station's first goal for the news department was to engage citizens in issues that affect the community. By mid-decade, the station's mission was to

“be the most trusted source for news and information in Central Texas.”³² By 2012, Vanderwilt wanted the station to be the news of record in the region.

By 2010 the staff was almost twice the size it had been in 2002. Ben Philpott was the state politics reporter and one of KUT’s most recognized names.

When I started at KUT news, most of our focus was on daily newscasts. As the newsroom grew, we had additional opportunities to do feature stories. But with each growth spurt, there was always the accompanying growth in our news hole. But what was a big help was having that clear civic journalism focus.

THE NEWS DEPARTMENT GROWS

Wells Dunbar joined KUT as an online reporter in January, 2012. He had been covering City Hall for the *Austin Chronicle* for several years. While the Chronicle, the *Austin American-Statesman*, TV and radio in Austin had been cutting back since the Great Recession of 2008, KUT had been expanding. He sought out opportunities at KUT because of the size of its audience and the impact of its news. Working at KUT, he thought, would give him “the opportunity to [report] on a different, broader level, with a lot more oomph and resource behind it.”

By that time, KUT news staff were producing content at a furious pace. Between 2011 and 2012 there was burst of hiring: two reporters for the StateImpact project, an afternoon newscast host and producer, a second politics reporter. All of those were new positions, but there were also new employees hired to replace reporters who had moved

³² KUT has developed two strategic plans since 2002. They are housed in the KUT business office.

on. In all, about half of the newsroom was newly hired in a span of about six months' time.

Was there a diffusion of mission? Dunbar said he was unaware when he arrived that KUT had a public journalism mission.

I guess it's almost more of a sort of branding, or self-defining sort of thing... KUT's always been intrinsic in my mind as a local station that reports on local important issues. Whether or not that's civic journalism depends in the way you frame things, I suppose.

The expansion came with some juggling. Philpott said he always had mission to fall back on.

I know there were times when I found myself flailing around trying to find news to cover. And I would often fall into the trap of covering stuff that didn't fall under KUT's mission. But having that civic journalism lens to filter our coverage through...I would have a path to getting back to news that needed to be covered...and find reasons to put aside the stuff I didn't need to cover.

But there were challenges. The more short newscasts the station added, the bigger the challenge. And listeners noticed. Michael King edited the *Austin Chronicle* from 2001-2015. What he heard developing over time, he said, is that "KUT tends to chase institutional sources, maybe a little bit more than we would."

Although he had plenty of space for in-depth reporting on issues online, Dunbar said, on-air staff didn't have that luxury.

It kind of turns into...is it better to cover something briefly and maybe not get as in-depth with it as it deserves...or is it better to just pass on it? And that gets into a philosophical question that I can't begin to answer.

Nevertheless, by 2012, KUT News was a recognizable brand in the community. Elizabeth Christian said, “It took a couple of years, but it’s become such a valuable part of the local news scene that I can’t imagine not having KUT news now...what seemed like a fledgling in 2002 is now, I think, one of everybody’s most important news vehicles.” Mary Gordon Spence “couldn’t imagine life without KUT.” By then, the former editor of the *Austin American-Statesman*, Rich Oppel said he’d listened to a lot of public radio stations over the years, and he’d put KUT up against any of them. At the *Austin Chronicle*, Michael King said,

The funny thing is, now that you ask me, it seems like it’s been there forever. Obviously it hasn’t. And, you know, it’s become indispensable, at least for local coverage and state coverage for that matter, because there’s nothing else like it. I guess you started small and have steadily expanded...Plus all of these overlapping partnerships with other folks. So, I couldn’t point to you and say, ‘yeah, here’s where I realized KUT was doing news.’ It seems like, to me, it’s been doing it for a long time.

SUCCESS?

Measuring the success of KUT’s news efforts demands measuring the success of the public journalism movement. It was more than 20 years old by 2012. Even its own proponents questioned whether it had taken hold. Heider and Merritt both agreed, public journalism as a strict method for news gathering had become something of a dinosaur. Neither was optimistic that any of its ideals had taken hold. Heider said, “I think it had a chance of success. But no. Established big media essentially put it out of business... there might be the odd out organization still doing it, but in the community where I live I don’t

see any evidence of it.”

Merritt said he sees no evidence of its practice in the larger journalism world.

No. No...I like to think that if we had started it 20 years before, when newspapers still were economically viable, that we would have had a much better chance. But by the 90's, by the time of momentum of what we were doing really got going, was the exact time newspapers began reducing the size of their staffs, and reducing their news hole and just didn't have the incentive or the resources to do any exploration or cultural growth and change.

Benschoter suspected any success depended on the individual organization. KUT and News 8 Austin both focused on their own brand of community engagement through journalism. But the old News 8 is gone now. In its place, Time Warner Cable News Austin no longer follows Benschoter's vision. Success, he said, depends in part on the editorial voice of a given newsroom or news organization. For electronic media like KUT and NPR, there's a very strong sense of service and engagement that it is core to the mission and what makes the organizations distinctive and relevant. But on the whole, he said, journalists in general do not practice public journalism.

I think that they are not trained to understand (and fulfill) the role of journalism in a functioning democracy. The type of journalism many journalist practice is learned by imitation and is often purposeless beyond its entertainment or sensational value. Filling time.

Poindexter said she thinks news organizations are not as dismissive or as elitist as they were in the past, because they cannot afford to be. But,

The vast majority...do not have a history of really paying attention to what the public is concerned about, what the public cares about, they're more likely to put it on the shelf. They can say that they did it, but they didn't necessarily try to figure out 'how we can make this work and how we use this.' And I wouldn't be surprised if a similar thing happened to KUT, because that's just the way news – I mean, news organizations, end up.

Oppel and Dinges were somewhat more optimistic about public journalism's success. Both said that the ascendance of digital media, and the public's – along with journalists' - access to data, served an important function of public journalism. Whereas traditional journalists, such as those at the *New York Times*, argued for the covering news from an objective fair-minded place, along with independently contributing to the commentary about news events:

“I think journalists today probably are an amalgam [of public journalism and traditional journalism],” Oppel said. In other words, he theorized, journalists today are probably practicing a diluted form of civic journalism in their daily routines, even at *The Times*.

Reading the *New York Times* Upshot column about the pervasiveness of poverty...is a mild moderate and restrained for [of that]... but the *Times* is looking to marry data to public issues and it does it very effectively. Being data driven is a significant component of public journalism and remains so. And even if you believe that public journalism has faded a little under the pressure of more limited resources, one thing that has sustained is the centrality of data-driven news coverage.

Dinges and Dunbar think social media present an avenue for newsrooms to broach a form of public journalism. Dinges said while journalists have not set aside their traditional

role as bystander, he actually thinks many of the techniques of civic journalism have been adapted. The greatest evidence is in the rise of data reporting and in social media. Social media has stopped journalism from being a one-way street.

The evolution we're undergoing right now and it's probably since the investigative journalism flourishing in the previous decades, now digital media is creating a revolution that in many ways is even greater. That said it has positive and negative aspects...I break down the function of journalism as serving democracy in three areas (1) providing information (2) investigating secrets and exposing abuse of power and (3) a public forum – providing a channel expression for the very broad spectrum of public opinion in the media itself. But the public forum function is very much being taken over by the digital media outside the mass media – the established profit making media – media that hire people and are able to have a major organizational basis to do their work. So the public expression of a public opinion I would say is greater now than at any other time in American history by far. And that is not dependent on the mass media as such. By the established organizational media and so digital media is in that way promoting a more open democracy.

Merritt argued social media didn't serve any purpose in engaging people more fully in democracy. "Just the opposite," he said.

The notion of shared information in any meaningful way is destroyed by there being too much information...the chance of any group of people are going to share any concrete information just doesn't exist anymore."

Dunbar suggested that social media raises serious gatekeeping issues for journalists. Dinges identified negative aspects to an unmonitored conversation without "gatekeepers to say what's beyond the pale and what's not beyond the pale."

So we're seeing a tendency toward exacerbated partisanship...opposition to the whole idea of compromise. The opposition to the idea that democracy is about hearing everybody out and finding the best practical political solution. That idea is being destroyed.

At KUT, Vanderwilt conceded much has changed since 2002. Inside his organization and out. The station is still committed to public service, part of which is strengthening democracy through its journalism.

I would say I have an evolving notion of what the role can and should be. And this goes to the term 'ambient atmosphere at the time.' When I think about our strategy going forward at the time, it was 'we have this big voice let's use it more effectively on behalf of the community.' We still have a big voice but there's many other voices. And so I think that increasingly, our role will be to deliver things to our community that can only be done from where we are and that as other news organizations change, go different directions...we could become the news of record to fill what feels like a shrinking role of the more traditional media. We've moved from being the alternative...to being the mainstream...And ...then the model starts to change from...enterprise reporting, civic journalism reporting...I don't know what the answer is here, but it could be that the news of the day becomes more dominant - never *the* dominant - certainly than it is now.

Discussion

KUT became, over the course of its first decade, a successful newsroom. But was it a successful public journalism newsroom?

I approached this paper expecting to discover that KUT did not, in fact, develop into a functional public journalism newsroom. But the research collected indicates a more nuanced result.

Some of the more heated rhetoric that passed between public journalism opponents such as Max Frankel and proponents such as Jay Rosen and Buzz Merritt, dealt with journalism norms and routines. The traditionalists argued that good journalists are gatekeepers who know what news is and decide what to deliver to the audience because that's the way it's always been done. The public journalists argued that audience should be involved in the selection of stories. Traditionalists called that pandering to the audience. Public journalists argued that traditionalists didn't want the audience to complicate discussions routinely boiled down to their most simplistic form by journalists too close to elite sources.

As John Dinges put it, "you can't just assume that because journalism and media exist that they are serving democracy."

Journalism is often called as much a trade as it is a profession. Journalists learn how to "do journalism" from practitioners who have learned the ropes from people who learned how to "do journalism" before them. They then teach it to those who come after them.

The KUT news department launched at a time when other media were contracting, if not downright collapsing. Perhaps it was an auspicious time in which to try to rewrite the traditional rules of journalism. As newsroom routines and influences were deteriorating in the face of the folding of the mass media business model, it seemed possible to train new journalists to embrace a mission to better serve democracy by engaging the populace more deeply in civic life. Much emphasis was placed on training staff to the station's founding document. But the early commitment to ideals may not have translated into perfect practice over the long haul. Buzz Merritt told me that while KUT had an admirable mission statement,

You can say you're doing public journalism...the people who are working for you...can think and believe they're doing that. When in fact, they're only following the old rules. So the result can't be very much different. And I don't know the answer to how you do that. We can't do frontal lobotomies on all young journalists.

In other words, he said, you cannot train journalists to unlearn habits, routines and expectations of the business that they learned before they began working for you. In the KUT newsroom, as pressures mounted and resources remained slim, journalists found it all too easy to fall back into time-saving habits during the day-to-day production of news. Especially in coverage of city and state politics, to make deadline reporters gradually began

to rely heavily on officials for soundbites and insiders for analysis. They – like the practitioners before them – spoke more to lawmakers and much less to people who were directly affected by the decisions made under the dome.

And at the station, as long-form reporting began taking a back seat to daily and breaking news, the challenge remained how to hew to the mission. Don Heider put it this way, “So to me there’s nothing wrong with breaking news. It’s how you report it. The question is, are you just reporting it or are you trying to provide [audiences] with what happened and why it happened?”

If a newsroom still tries to provide the reasons and the issues behind the headlines, then, it may still be practicing a diluted form of public journalism. These days, KUT “is a newsroom that clearly employs civic journalism as one of its important tools,” said Rich Oppel.

But the decline of the mass media model that helped KUT create an identity for its newsroom may also be its existential challenge. In the words of *The Austin Chronicle’s* editor, Michael King,

KUT’s news is still very young. I mean, and you’re trying basically, like we all are, to be all things to all people. And I don’t know how we can do that. What the shape of journalism is in the next 20 years, I don’t know. And that’s a question I’m not gonna have to answer, but you will.

Like most qualitative research, these findings are likely not as generalizable as some researchers would wish. While the interviews in this project indicate an awareness of the concept of public journalism among the KUT News staff - more so in its infancy and less so as the newsroom matured - content analyses of KUT's news sourcing and its reporting over the decade investigated in this research would no doubt provide further insight into whether the journalism output matched the mission.

An analysis of the effect of KUT's reporting on the public and whether it effected any change in civic engagement or actions – either through surveys or more qualitative methods – might also provide insight into whether the station was at all successful in more fully engaging its community in the democratic process. User surveys would no doubt provide further more scientific understanding of KUT's performance, as would a larger in-depth interview study of most if not all of the journalists who have passed through the newsroom.

Conclusion

Unlike the vast quantities of research and discussion of theory that were produced with the onset of the public journalism movement, little has been written about the actual day-today gathering of news using the public journalism model.

This study set out to answer three research questions that would give a glimpse into the microcosm of a transitional point in journalism as it was being practiced; examine whether civic journalism is a model which is in fact practicable and what lessons can be applied in a larger context.

When public journalism was first proposed, some journalists expressed concern that the role of the gatekeeper would be lost and the profession's established practices and norms would be damaged or destroyed. Public journalism's tenets of seeking input from the community in story selection and coverage streams and fostering a more direct civic engagement in the democratic process with the help of the newsroom was but part of a larger revolution that started in the late 20th century and eventually irrevocably changed the workings of newsgathering and dissemination. Today, it seems almost impossible to produce news without some stakeholder input or direction. The ascendancy of digital platforms allows for much greater and direct interaction with the audience (Deuze, Bruns & Neuberger, 2009). The rise of blogs and microblogs cemented the public's perception that news was a two way street (Burns, 2003). It also reframed the concept of "community." Where once a community may have been limited to a set of streets or organizations to which an individual belonged, now communities are digital and

amorphous. John Dinges feared those digital communities can also be the most strident and partisan and therefore threaten journalism's role in democracy.

We'll sort out the cause and effect later but in effect what we're seeing is multi-polar politics at the expense of compromise in practical politics and I think that's associated with digital media.

As this paper and the practices at KUT in Austin demonstrate, the ideals of public journalism are not dead. While it may have morphed from a strict set of guiding principles, those principles seem to have influenced the practice of journalism at KUT specifically - where some journalists are actively referring to the ideal in the daily practice of job duties - and in newsrooms in general. It also seems clear that - even among those who do not believe the public journalism movement was successful - facets of the movement infiltrated the norms of newsroom routine. While those opposed to the concept of public journalism resisted the idea of opening the newsroom gates to the public, the intervening transformation of media has made that point moot. The gates are open (Goode, 2009). But that may also have provided traditionalists an opportunity. As digital and social media become more commonplace methods for audiences to gratify their needs for information gathering and opinion sharing, researchers may find that the role of the gatekeeper is reinvigorated. If, as John Dinges so succinctly set forth, the goal of public journalism was to ascertain what people are concerned about in the public sphere that they want the political system to address, then in today's even more fractured media environment that is largely defined by digital and social media, the gatekeeper continues to hold a primary role

within the newsroom, to ensure that journalists continue to serve democracy and the democratic process.

Appendices

Table 1 – Who Was Interviewed

NAME	TITLE at KUT News’ Inception	ORGANIZATION
Stewart Vanderwilt	General Manger	KUT Radio
Don Heider	Associate Professor of Journalism	UT Austin
W. Davis “Buzz” Merritt	Author, Retired Editor and Vice President	Wichita Eagle
John Dinges	Professor of Journalism	Columbia University
Kate Dearborn	Journalist	Freelance
Ben Philpott	Reporter	KUT Radio
Wells Dunbar	Digital Reporter	Radio
Joy Diaz	Reporter & Producer	KUT
Kevin Brass	Journalist	Freelance
Mary Gordon Spence	Writer	Freelance
James Cousar	Attorney	Thompson and Knight
Elizabeth Christian	President and CEO	Elizabeth Christian PR
Paula Poindexter	Associate Professor of Journalism	UT Austin
John Scanlan	Member	KUT Advisory Board
Michael King	Editor	Austin Chronicle
Brian Benschoter	General Manager	News 8 Austin
Rich Oppel	Editor	Austin American-Statesman

KUT-FM Guidelines and Editorial Standards

KUT News intends to serve the public interest by connecting citizens with information they need to participate fully in civic life and to partake of the rich culture of Central Texas.

This is a list of editorial guidelines that will help KUT News achieve that goal. These guidelines are intended to serve as a foundation for our integrity and credibility. They have been created through research and by referencing ethical guidelines established by other journalistic organizations including the Radio and Television News Directors Association, Public Radio News Directors Incorporated, RFE, The Christian Science Monitor and with advice from individual journalists.

These guidelines set minimum standards for KUT reporters, editors, hosts and producers to ensure our coverage is fair, accurate, balanced, independent and ethical. Listeners must be able to believe KUT news will broadcast unbiased reporting based on fact and careful analysis.

Reporters and editorial staff will adhere to the highest standards of journalism. The goals of KUT News are to inform, to enlighten, to delight, to interpret (through editorial commentary), to stimulate thinking, and to serve as a catalyst for informed and responsible community action.

The philosophy of each standard is set out below:

***FAIRNESS:**

KUT reporters and anchors will treat all subjects with the integrity and respect we would expect from others. This is the cornerstone of our credibility. Fairness will set the tone of the KUT Newsroom and will serve as the foundation upon which KUT News will build its reputation in the community.

At its most basic level, KUT News staff will:

1. always strive to retain the spirit and context of those whom we quote;
2. fact check each and all claims before they are broadcast;
3. respect 'off the record' agreements with background sources
4. provide attribution (or sufficient source identification) for every quote;

Reporters should avoid using anonymous sources. Reporters may not grant any source anonymity without prior approval from the KUT News Director. In the rare instance that KUT News Director approves the use of anonymous source, information from that source must be confirmed with at least one other independent source. Additionally, if that information is referenced in any report, reporter must indicate the source's affiliation, and that the source's point of view could contain bias. Reporters will reveal the identity of anonymous sources to the News Director upon request. Reporters should be aware that when anonymity is granted to any source, the reporter, KUT and the University of Texas are responsible for any statement made by such source. KUT news will aggressively protect the identity of sources granted anonymity; and reporters should know that protection could potentially include jail time.

5. never exploit people in pain or immediate emotional distress; avoid antagonism for its own sake ("gotcha" journalism);

6. treat all stories and sources, including the University of Texas and its interests, with equal respect and objectivity; apply the same standards of fairness, balance, accuracy, independence and integrity to stories about the University of Texas and its interests, including KUT-FM, as any other stories we cover.

Fairness, as an editorial value, is tacit acknowledgment of the dignity of the speaker and the value of his/her ideas, without the taint of prejudice, dismissiveness, favoritism, exploitation, or malice.

***BALANCE:**

Editorial balance is mutuality of 'Fairness', that is, respect for the speaker as well as respect for 'those spoken of' and those who may not have an equal platform or opportunity to voice dissenting or differing perspectives. Balance assumes no monopoly of ideas. Balance also implies respect for the listener's interest in forming a well-rounded opinion.

KUT editorial staff will seek a diversity of opinion on issues and subjects covered. Opposing ideas will be afforded equal editorial weight.

At a minimum, KUT News staff will:

1. pursue a plurality of perspective in its reporting;
2. offer an opportunity for subjects to respond to direct or indirect allegations;
3. go beyond superficial bi-polarism ("he said/she said"; "Republicans say/ Democrats

say") by giving a voice to people directly impacted – the roots of complex stories run in many directions;

4. never offer an open forum to a single viewpoint without offering a similar opportunity for divergent or opposing viewpoints.

Balance is not exclusively measured by the length of opposing sound bites. Tone, focus, and subject matter are also factors. Often balance will be achieved contemporaneously (a diversity of views in a single story); other times, balance may best be achieved over a period of time (a three day series, each with a different perspective). Balance is never accidental, nor is it an afterthought. Balance is a deliberate effort to provide a range of ideas on a subject, allowing listeners to form intelligent, even divergent, opinions.

***ACCURACY:**

Accuracy is at the heart of 'Fairness' (and, therefore, 'Balance'). Moreover, the integrity and reputation of KUT News rests on trustworthiness. Therefore, KUT editorial staff will make every effort to ensure that all stories, whether broadcast or otherwise published, are factually accurate. No story will be broadcast if based on mere rumor or unsubstantiated account.

At a minimum, KUT News staff will:

1. Verify any claim with two independent sources before broadcast/publication;
2. certify to the editor prior to broadcast that all facts have been properly verified (while reporters or editors may check passages with sources for accuracy and clarity, no source has veto power or editing rights over KUT news stories);
3. immediately inform the News Director of any mistake of fact, and offer prompt retraction and correction;
4. under no circumstances attempt to color or shade facts for impact or editorial effect.

A failure to properly check facts (or an attempt to distort facts) endangers the reputation of KUT News and the University of Texas, and may also expose KUT and the University of Texas to legal liability. KUT News staff is expected to follow these guidelines without exception, to go 'the extra mile' to verify claims, and to seek the advice of the News Director on any question in this regard. In setting such a standard, KUT-FM news recognizes that we may sometimes trade "immediacy" for accuracy. We believe this to be an acceptable trade-off.

***INDEPENDENCE:**

Independence will be a cornerstone of KUT News product. KUT Editorial staff will make every effort to ensure that all stories, whether broadcast or otherwise published, remain editorially independent of any outside influence.

At a minimum, KUT News staff will:

1. Research and report news based solely on editorial judgment without deference to outside influences including but not limited to the University of Texas and its interests, KUT's advisory council, advertisers or underwriters, political parties or special interest groups, business affiliations and/or any outside entity which would seek influence or control over KUT editorial content;
2. clearly identify sources of support or funding for KUT-FM or KUT News either within any story or element that references such sources or by referring listeners to the KUT web-site for a list of funders; KUT-FM news staff will avoid the use of funding sources as experts within any story;
3. recognize that such funding or sponsorship will not in any way influence news product or style of reporting on any subject;
4. immediately inform the KUT News Director of any conflict, or appearance of conflict between performance of job and any affiliation, business, financial, political or other interest;
4. treat all stories and sources, including the University of Texas and its interests, with equal respect and objectivity; apply the same standards of fairness, balance, accuracy, independence and integrity to stories about the University of Texas and its interests, including KUT-FM, as any other stories we cover.

KUT editorial staff should recognize that with independence comes accountability, and that all reports and reporters, whether broadcast or otherwise, will be held accountable for maintaining KUT editorial standards.

***INTEGRITY:** Integrity is what results when honesty, fairness, balance and independence are thoughtfully applied. Integrity is the glue that holds KUT News' editorial values together. KUT editorial staff should adhere firmly to KUT's editorial guidelines, and make every effort to honestly and conscientiously uphold those values. By so doing, KUT editorial staff will be setting the standards from which listeners' trust will develop. The integrity of KUT news and editorial staff demonstrates faithfulness to

our commitment to listeners: to provide public service journalism and to serve as a catalyst for informed community action.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST: KUT-FM editorial staff should make every effort to avoid any conflict of interest or appearance of conflict of interest that could affect the credibility and integrity of the news department. KUT news product should never reflect a reporter's affiliation beyond his/her affiliation with KUT-FM. To that end, please review the items below and speak with the News Director regarding any outside affiliations which you believe might constitute a conflict of interest or the appearance of conflict of interest. Failure to do so may be met with disciplinary action.

- * KUT-FM editorial staff should seek approval in advance for any freelance activity that could reflect upon the reputation of KUT-FM news. Examples include appearing as on-air talent for any broadcaster other than KUT-FM, teaching courses, making speeches, or writing freelance articles.

- * Editorial staff should alert the News Director of any financial contributions to or affiliation with any political or public issue campaign. As with all political affiliations and events, KUT news staff should be "mindful that you represent the organization and its news coverage in the eyes of your friends, neighbors and others. So please think twice about the message you may be sending about our objectivity before you attend a rally or post a bumper sticker or yard sign." (NPR)

- * Editorial staff should alert the News Director if he/she is asked to report or edit a story about a subject or entity in which he/she has a personal or financial interest.

- * Editorial staff should alert the News Director if he/she is involved with a group for which advocacy is a major purpose. In this case, staff can assume that such affiliation would be a conflict of interest.

- * Editorial staff may not accept money or goods or other benefits from groups or companies with a vested interest in KUT news coverage.

References

- Aitamurto, T. (2011). The impact of crowdfunding on journalism: Case study of Spot.Us, a platform for community-funded reporting. *Journalism practice*, 5(4), 429-445.
- Arant, M. D., & Meyer, P. (1998). Public and traditional journalism: A shift in values?. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 13(4), 205-218.
- Atton, C., & Wickenden, E. (2005). Sourcing routines and representation in alternative journalism: A case study approach. *Journalism Studies*, 6(3), 347-359.
- Berkowitz, D., & Beach, D. W. (1993). News sources and news context: The effect of routine news, conflict and proximity. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 70(1), 4-12.
- Black, J. (2013). *Mixed news: The public/communitarian journalism debate*. Routledge.
- Blanchard, M. (1998). History of the mass media in the United States: An encyclopedia. Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers.
- Blasingame, D. (2011, June). Twitter First: Changing TV news 140 characters at a time. *International Symposium on Online Journalism, UT, Austin*, Retrieved: November 25, 2012; from: <http://online.journalism.utexas.edu/2011/papers/Dale2011.pdf>.
- Bogart, L. (1980). Television news as entertainment. *The entertainment functions of television*, 209-249.
- Bowman, S. & Willis, C. (2003), We media: how audiences are shaping the future of news and information, *The Media Center at the American Press Institute*. Retrieved February 14, 2011, from: http://www.hypergene.net/wemedia/download/we_media.pdf
- Bruns, A. (2005). *Gatewatching: Collaborative online news production* (Vol. 26). Peter Lang.
- Bruns, A. (2008). 3.1. The Active Audience: Transforming Journalism from Gatekeeping to Gatewatching.

- Bruns, A. (2009). From reader to writer: Citizen journalism as news produsage. In *International handbook of internet research* (pp. 119-133). Springer Netherlands.
- Bruns, A. (2009). News blogs and citizen journalism: New directions for e-journalism. *e-Journalism: New Media and News Media*, 101-126.
- Cappella, J. N., & Jamieson, K. H. (1996). News frames, political cynicism, and media cynicism. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 71-84.
- Carey, J. W. (2007). A short history of journalism for journalists: A proposal and essay. *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, 12(1), 3-16.
- Cassidy, W. P. (2007). Online news credibility: An examination of the perceptions of newspaper journalists. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12(2), 478-498.
- Clayfield, M. (2012). Tweet the press: How social media is changing the way journalists do their jobs.
- Cohn, J. (1995, Summer). Should journalists do community service? *The American Prospect*. Retrieved from <http://prospect.org/article/should-journalists-do-community-service>
- Conte, C. (1996). Civic journalism: Can press reforms revitalize democracy? *CQ Researcher*, 6(35). Retrieved from <http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/document.php?id=cqresrre1996092000>
- Cook, T. E., Gronke, P., & Rattliff, J. (2000, June). Disdaining the media: The American public's changing attitudes toward the news. In *annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, DC*.
- Corrigan, D. (1995). Does 'Public Journalism' Serve the Public or the Publishers?. *St. Louis Journalism Review*, 26.
- Curran, J. (2000). Press reformism 1918-98: a study of failure'in H. Tumber. *Media Power, Professionals and Policies*.
- Curtis, L., Edwards, C., Fraser, K. L., Gudelsky, S., Holmquist, J., Thornton, K., & Sweetser, K. D. (2010). Adoption of social media for public relations by nonprofit organizations. *Public Relations Review*, 36(1), 90-92.

- Davis, S. (2000). Steve Davis (2000) Public Journalism: the case against, *Journalism Studies*, 1:4, 686-689, DOI: 10.1080/146167000441394
- Deuze, M., Bruns, A., & Neuberger, C. (2007). Preparing for an age of participatory news. *Journalism practice*, 1(3), 322-338.
- Deuze, M. (2008). Understanding journalism as newswork: How it changes, and how it remains the same. *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture*, 5(2).
- DiCicco-Bloom, B., & Crabtree, B. F. (2006). The qualitative research interview. *Medical education*, 40(4), 314-321.
- Donahue Brown, E. (2010) Blackwell, E., & Conrod, P.J. (2003). *For love or money: The role of nonprofits in preserving serious journalism*. Unpublished manuscript, College of Communications, Department of Journalism, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas.
- Dzur, A. W. (2002). Public journalism and deliberative democracy. *Polity*, 313-336. Downloaded from 128.83.111.61 on Wed, 30 Mar 2016 22:11:50 UTC
- Eksterowicz, A. J., & Roberts, R. N. (2000). *Public journalism and political knowledge*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, A. P. (2011). Autoethnography: an overview. *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung*, 273-290.
- Frankel, M. (1995). Fix-it journalism. (1995, May 21). *The New York Times*. Retrieved from: <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/05/21/magazine/word-image-fix-it-journalism.html>
- Frankel, M. (1999). Media madness: The revolution so far. *The Cato Report on Journalism and society*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ciaonet.org/attachments/1902/uploads>
- Friedland, L. (2000). Public journalism and community change. *Public journalism and political knowledge*, 121-42.
- Gable, Guy G. (1994). Integrating case study and survey research methods: an example in information systems. *European Journal of Information Systems* 3(2):pp. 112-126. Retrieved from <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/5853/1/5853.pdf>

- Gade, P., Abel, S., Antecol, M., Hsueh, H. Y., Hume, J., Morris, J., & Sanders, K. (1998). Journalists' attitudes toward civic journalism media roles. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 19(4), 13.
- Gans, H. J. (1979) Deciding what's news: a study of CBS evening news, NBC nightly news. *Newsweek, and Time*. New York: Pantheon.
- Gans, H. (1998). What can journalists actually do.
- Glasser, T. L., & Craft, S. (1998). Public journalism and the search for democratic ideals. *Ecquid Novi*, 19(1), 7-23.
- Glasser, T. L. (Ed.). (1999). *The idea of public journalism*. Guilford Press.
- Goode, L. (2009). Social news, citizen journalism and democracy. *New Media & Society*.
- Graber, D., Heider, D., Vanderwilt, S. (2000, October 10). *The creation of a KUT radio news department*. Concept Paper.
- Haas, T. (2007). *The pursuit of public journalism: Theory, practice, and criticism*. Routledge.
- Haas, T., & Steiner, L. (2006). Public journalism a reply to critics. *Journalism*, 7(2), 238-254.
- Haas, T., & Steiner, L. (2002). Fears of corporate colonization in journalism reviews' critiques of public journalism. *Journalism Studies*, 3(3), 325-341.
- Hardwig, J. (1998, November 6). You won't hear that on commercial radio. *The Austin Chronicle*. Retrieved from <http://www.austinchronicle.com/music/1998-11-06/520561/>
- Heider, D., McCombs, M., & Poindexter, P. M. (2005). What the public expects of local news: Views on public and traditional journalism. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 82(4), 952-967.
- Katz, E. (1957) The two-step flow of communication: An up-to-date report on an hypothesis." *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 21:1 (Spring, 1957), pp. 61-78. Retrieved November 23, 2012 from: http://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1279&context=asc_papers

- Katz, E., Gurevitch, M. & Haas, H. (1973). On the use of mass media for important things. Retrieved November 23, 2012 from http://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1275&context=asc_papers
- Katz, E., Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, M. (1974). Utilization of mass communication by the individual. In J. G. Blumler & E. Katz (Eds.), *The uses of mass communication: Current perspectives on gratifications research* (pp. 19-32). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Katz, E., Blumler, J.G., & Gurevitch, M. (1973). Uses and gratifications research. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 37, 509–523
- Kimball, P. (1994). *Downsizing the news: Network cutbacks in the nation's capital*. Woodrow Wilson Center Press.
- Kiousis, S. (2001). Public trust or mistrust? Perceptions of media credibility in the information age. *Mass Communication and Society*, 4, 381–403.
- Klapper, J. (1960). *The effects of mass communications*. New York: Free Press.
- Kovach, B., & Rosenstiel, T. (2007). *The elements of journalism: What newspeople should know and the public should expect*. Three Rivers Press (CA).
- Kurpius, D. D. (2002). Sources and civic journalism: Changing patterns of reporting?. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 79(4), 853-866.
- Lambeth, E. B. (1998). Public journalism as a democratic practice. *Assessing public journalism*, 15-35.
- Lippmann, W. (1913). *A preface to politics*. Prometheus Books.
- Lippmann, W. (1922). *Public Opinion*. New York:
- Luo, M. M., Chea, S., & Chen, J. S. (2011). Web-based information service adoption: A comparison of the motivational model and the uses and gratifications theory. *Decision Support Systems*, 51(1), 21-30.
- Massey, B. L., & Haas, T. (2002). Does making journalism more public make a difference? A critical review of evaluative research on public journalism. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 79(3), 559-586. Downloaded from jmq.sagepub.com at University of Texas Libraries on March 30, 2016.

- Massey, B. L. (1998). Civic journalism and nonelite sourcing: Making routine newswork of community connectedness. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 75(2), 394-407.
- McNair, B. (2000). *Journalism and democracy*. London: Routledge.
- Merritt, D. (1997). Public journalism, independence and civic capital, Three ideas in complete harmony.
- Merritt, D., & Rosen, J. (1995). *Imagining public journalism: An editor and scholar reflect on the birth of an idea* (No. 5). Roy W. Howard Project, School of Journalism, Indiana University.
- Meyer, P. (1995). Public journalism and the problem of objectivity. *The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill* [Date Accessed: 20th April 2010]: <http://www.unc.edu/~pmeyer/ire95.pj.htm>.
- Moy, P., & Pfau, M. (2000). *With malice toward all?: The media and public confidence in democratic institutions*. Greenwood Publishing Group.
- Moy, P., & Scheufele, D. A. (2000). Media effects on political and social trust. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 77(4), 744-759.
- Nip, J. Y. (2006). Exploring the second phase of public journalism 1. *Journalism studies*, 7(2), 212-236.
- Noor, K. B. M. (2008). Case study: A strategic research methodology. *American journal of applied sciences*, 5(11), 1602-1604.
- Oppel, R. A. (1997). Three steps to improve public journalism. *American society of newspaper editors*. (January-February 1997) Retrieved from <http://files.asne.org/kiosk/editor/97.jan-feb/oppel1.htm>
- Palmgreen, P. (1984). Uses and gratifications: Atheoretical perspective. In R. N. Bostrom (Ed.), *Communication Yearbook 8* (pp. 20-55). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
- Papacharissi, Z. (2008). *Uses and gratifications. An integrated approach to communication theory and research*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Parisi, P. (1997) Toward a philosophy of news framing: News narratives for public journalism. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 74, 673-686.

- Passerini, L. (1987). *Fascism in popular memory: The cultural experience of the Turin working class* (Vol. 10). Cambridge University Press.
- Pavlik, J. (2000). The impact of technology on journalism. *Journalism Studies*, 1(2), 229-237.
- Perloff, R. M. (2013). *Political communication: Politics, press, and public in America*. Routledge.
- Pew Research Center for People & the Press (1994, May 19). Public tunes out recent news. Retrieved from <http://www.people-press.org/files/legacy-pdf/19940519.pdf>
- Pew Research Center for People & the Press (1995, April 6). Network news viewing and newspapers reading off: Did OJ do it?. Retrieved from <http://www.people-press.org/files/legacy-pdf/19950406.pdf>
- Poindexter, P. M., Heider, D., & McCombs, M. (2006). Watchdog or Good Neighbor? The public's expectations of local news. *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, 11(1), 77-88.
- Putnam, R. D. (1995). Bowling alone: America's declining social capital. *Journal of democracy*, 6(1), 65-78.
- Reese, S. D., & Ballinger, J. (2001). The roots of a sociology of news: Remembering Mr. Gates and social control in the newsroom. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 78(4), 641-658.
- Riege, A. M. (2003). Validity and reliability tests in case study research: a literature review with "hands-on" applications for each research phase. *Qualitative market research: An international journal*, 6(2), 75-86.
- Rosen, J. (1996). *Getting the connections right: Public journalism and the troubles in the press*. Twentieth Century Foundation.
- Rosen, J. (1999). *What are journalists for?* Yale University Press.
- Rosen, J., Merritt, D., & Austin, L. (1997). *Public journalism: Theory and practice: Lessons from experience*. Kettering Foundation.

- Rosenberg, H. (1996, June 23). Where crime does not pay. *The Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from: http://articles.latimes.com/1996-06-23/entertainment/ca-17618_1_crime-prevention
- Rosenberry, J., & St John, B. (Eds.). (2009). *Public journalism 2.0: The promise and reality of a citizen engaged press*. Routledge.
- Ruggiero, T. E. (2000). Uses and gratifications theory in the 21st century. *Mass Communication & Society*, 3(1), 3-37.
- Ryan, M. (2001). Michael Ryan (2001) Journalistic ethics, objectivity, existential journalism, standpoint epistemology, and public journalism. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 16(1), 3-22, DOI: 10.1207/S15327728JMME1601_2
- Schudson, M. (2001). The objectivity norm in American journalism*. *Journalism*, 2(2), 149-170.
- Shaver, D. (2010). Online non-profits provide model for added local news. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 31(4), 16.
- Shoemaker, P. J. (1991). *Communication concepts 3: Gatekeeping*. Newbury Park: Sage.
- Shoemaker, P.J. & Reese, S. D. (1996). *Mediating the message: theories of influences on mass media content*. (2nd ed.) White Plains: Longman Publishers.
- Singer, J. B. (1998). Online journalists: Foundations for research into their changing roles. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 4(1), 0-0.
- Singer, J. B. (2003). Who are these guys? The online challenge to the notion of journalistic professionalism. *Journalism*, 4(2), 139-163.
- Singer, J. B., Domingo, D., Heinonen, A., Hermida, A., Paulussen, S., Quandt, T., ... & Vujnovic, M. (2011). *Participatory journalism: Guarding open gates at online newspapers*. John Wiley & Sons.

- Sirianni, C., & Friedland, L. (2001). *Civic innovation in America: Community empowerment, public policy, and the movement for civic renewal*. University of California Press.
- Top Ten Media Moments. (2003, January 3). *The Austin Chronicle*. Retrieved from: <http://www.austinchronicle.com/news/2003-01-03/116087/>
- Voakes, P. S. (2004). A brief history of public journalism. *National civic review*, 93(3), 25-35.
- Waldman, S. (2011, June). *The information needs of communities: The changing media landscape in a broadband age*. Federal Communication Commission Radio Today Report: General Listening Series 1998-2010. Retrieved from: <https://transition.fcc.gov/osp/inc-report/INoC-2-Radio.pdf>
- Wengraf, T. (2001). *Qualitative research interviewing: Biographic narrative and semi-structured methods*. Sage.
- White, D.M. (1950). The “gate-keeper”: A case study in the selection of news. *Journalism Quarterly*, 27, 383-390.
- Whitney, D. C., Chambers, S., & Costain, A. (2001). Deliberation, Democracy, and the Media.
- Who Killed the Newspaper?. (2006, August 24). *The Economist*. Retrieved from <http://www.economist.com/node/7830218>.
- Witt, L. (2004, Fall). Is public journalism morphing into the public’s journalism?. *National Civic Review*, 49-57
- Yankelovich, D. (1991). *Coming to public judgment: Making democracy work in a complex world*. Syracuse University Press.

Yin, R. K. (1989). Case study research: Design and methods, revised edition. *Applied Social Research Methods Series*, 5.

Yin, R. (1994). Case study research: Design and methods. Beverly Hills.

Yonan, J. (2011, March 27), Can Austin stay weird?. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from <http://www.northjersey.com/travel/can-austin-stay-weird-1.911576?page=all>